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July 1, 1890.

No. 675.

\$2.50
a Year.

PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY BEADLE AND ADAMS.
No. 98 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

Price,
5 Cents.

Vol. XXVI.



"SWEET PERTATERS!" CRIED THE EX-GAMIN, "LOOK HERE. WHAT D' YE MAKE OUT O' THIS? IT IS SKINNY'S SIGN-MANUAL, SURE'S YOU'RE BORN."

OR, Beating San Francisco's Finest.

BY J. C. COWDRICK,
AUTHOR OF "BROADWAY BILLY" NOVELS, ETC.

CHAPTER I.

LIEUTENANT SKINNY LOST.
"SWEET pertaters!"

Broadway Billy, wide awake.
But he had not yet got out of bed.

It was early morning, daylight was looking in at the window of Billy's room in the hotel, and San Francisco was just rousing up to another day of activity.

With the exclamation, Billy sat up in bed and rubbed his eyes. He looked around the room carefully. The exclamation was repeated, and as he repeated it the lad sprung out of bed.

He missed his slim partner.

"Skinny, his lieutenant, was gone!"

"Where kin that frail shadde be?" Billy demanded of himself. "Here's his clothes, hat, boots, and everything; but I don't see hide nor hair of th' skeleton. I wonder what's become of him. Here's a mystery, sure enough."

He looked under the bed, into the closet, behind their trunk—everywhere where he thought Skinny might be; but that meager individual was nowhere to be found.

"Sweet pertaters!" Billy repeated yet again; "this is gettin' interestin', an' that's a fack."

He examined the door, and found it locked, with the key on the inside.

"This steals th' plum, this does!" he cried. "Where has that starved-lookin' sign o' famine gone to, anyhow? How did he git out of th' room and leave th' door locked behind him? Mebbe he's flattened himself out and gone under th' door. It begins ter strike me that this is no joke, and—Hello! the window!"

With the thought he sprung to the window.

Before touching it he looked to see if it was the same as it had been when he and Skinny retired.

Yes, it was the same. It was open about two inches at top and bottom, just as he had arranged it in order to have proper ventilation.

Throwing the window up, he looked out and down to the ground below.

Nothing was seen that would in any way offer an explanation of the mystery.

The window opened upon an alley, and the hotel and the adjoining buildings were ten feet apart. There was a big gate between the two building, and the alley was used by the hotel people as a convenient way to the rear quarters and kitchen.

Billy did not know what the adjoining building was used for. All of its windows, on the side next to the hotel, were closed with iron shutters.

There was no window opposite the one of the boys' room, though there was one a little higher up and some feet nearer the street.

"Snap my fore-royal-stay if I ain't oneasy!" Billy exclaimed. "What kin be th' meanin' of this, anyhow? Where in th' name o' wonders is that slender an' tender sapling? I must be gettin' a move on me ter find out, and that's plain."

Billy lost no time in getting into his clothes, and as soon as he was dressed he left the room and hurried down to the office.

"Say," he demanded of the clerk, "have ye got bedbugs in this ranch?"

"What d' ye mean?" the clerk snapped.

"I mean jest what I'm askin'," was the retort; "have ye got bedbugs in this hotel?"

"Have you been troubled with any?"

"No, haven't seen a sign o' one," Billy declared, "an' that is jest what's the matter. That's what's puzzlin' me. If I'd seen bugs, then there wouldn't be any mystery about it."

"What are you trying to get through you, anyhow?"

"Sweet pertaters!" ejaculated the Gamin Detective, "your understandin' must be as thick as that of a model New York juryman. Can't ye answer my question? Didn't I make it as plain as th' English language can make it?"

"About the bugs?"

"Cert."

"We haven't heard a word of complaint about bugs for years."

"Then th' mystery is all th' deeper and blacker."

"Now, what are you talking about?" the clerk demanded. "Is this some joke you are trying to work off?"

"I only hope it is a joke," Billy responded. "At th' present stage of th' game I don't know what it is. That fat partner of mine is missing."

"Missing? Oh, he'll turn up."

"I don't know whether he will or not. He's left his clothes, and that strikes me as funny."

"Maybe he is in the bath."

Billy darted away to look, in spite of the fact that he had found the door locked on the inside.

"No, he ain't there," he reported, on returning, "and, I might 'a' known it. Th' fack is, clerk, I found th' door locked on th' inside when I woke up, and Skinny wasn't in the room."

Now the clerk looked puzzled.

"Is that so?" he interrogated.

"So? Of course it's so! D'ye suppose I'd be makin' all this fuss if it wasn't so? I tell ye there's a mystery here, a mystery as big as a house. How did my lean partner git out of that room? and where has he gone to?"

"He must be playing some joke on you."

"Can't be. I've searched th' room. He ain't there. What I want is ter know where ter look for him."

"Perhaps he has fallen from the win—"

"Nixey. I've looked out the window. Not a hair of him to be seen. Not even a bone."

"Well, it is strange. But, what did you mean by asking about bugs?"

"Why, I thought mebby two or three of 'em had taken him foul and carried him off. Since ye don't have 'em here, though, that theory don't count fer much."

"Wait a moment and I'll go up with you."

"Come along."

The clerk called a porter and told him to stay in the office till his return, and set out with Billy to go up to the room.

When they arrived there no change had taken place in the situation.

Skinny's clothes lay on the floor just where he had "shed" them, and the emaciated partner was not there.

"The window is wide open," observed the clerk.

"I opened it to look out," explained Billy.

The clerk looked out, but could discover no more than Billy had been able to detect.

There was no means by which the lad could have gone out that way without a fall, and there was nothing below to indicate that he had met that fate.

It was truly a remarkable matter. How had Skinny gone from the room? Why had he gone, with no clothes on? Where was he now?

These questions could not be answered.

"Hang out my fore-skysail-topsail," cried Billy, "if this don't jest reef my spenser. Sweet pertaters! where kin that bony youth be? This is growin' distressin', an' that's ther fack. What is goin' ter be did about it?"

"I don't know," said the clerk. "Maybe you had better take it easy for an hour or so, or until after breakfast anyhow, and see if he don't turn up."

"I don't know but there's horse sense in that," agreed Billy, "and I guess I'll follow your advice. Make all th' inquiries you can, on the quiet, though."

"Yes, I'll do that."

The clerk went out of the room, and Billy sat down to think.

Here was something that he had never dreamed of—that he would lose his partner, and in such a mysterious way as this.

It may well be believed that Billy's mind was busy. Where was Skinny? How was he to set about finding him? Questions that he could not answer, try as he would.

Finally he washed and combed, and a little later went down to his breakfast.

Inquiries were made about Skinny, and Billy told all about the mysterious matter.

Surprise was expressed all around the board, but no one could offer any key to the problem.

When breakfast was over Billy returned to the room, but Skinny had not yet put in an appearance.

"Well, somethin' has got ter be did, and that's th' bare, bald-headed truth," the lad decided. "But, what's it ter be? I reckon I'll drop around and see th' chief of police and see if he can't help me out of th' diffikility. Sweet pertaters! what in all creation will I do without my lieutenant? Can't spare him, nohow. Besides, I promised his mom that I'd bring him home again safe and sound. Skinny must be diskivered, and that's th' long and th' short of th' hull thing."

Billy was a good deal puzzled, and a good deal worried, and no wonder. How was this mysterious disappearance to be explained?

Putting things in order in the room, as far as concerned his and Skinny's effects, Billy went down to the office again.

"Has he turned up?" asked the clerk.

"No," said Billy, "and now I'm goin' to put th' matter into the hands of the police. We'll see what your police are good for on a blind trail. Skinny was only a shadde, anyhow, and now that he's missing I don't know what to call it. It will be about th' thinnest clew that any detective ever follerred, and that I'm givin' you in a lump. I'll bet it wouldn't puzzle our Inspector Br—Hello! did you speak to me?"

A gentleman, holding a morning paper in his hand, had touched Billy on the arm and spoken his name.

"Yes," he said, "here is something that may interest you."

"What is it?" Billy asked.

"A brief accout of an escaped prisoner. It seems that one of the men you were instrumental in capturing has got away from the police, and—"

"Which one is it?" asked Billy, eagerly.

"Dan Bingham, alias 'Sharkey Dan.'"

"Sweet pertaters!" Billy cried, "has that feller got away? That means danger to yours truly, and it may be that he has had a hand in Skinny's sudden taking off. I think I'll bustle around a little now, sure pop. I'd give a silver brick if I could bottle that feller up again, an' that's a fack."

"It is not likely that you will have the opportunity," remarked the man, "for no doubt he is putting distance between himself and San Francisco as fast as he can."

"Anyhow, I'll keep my weather eye open wide."

Just then a messenger entered the hotel office, and handed the clerk a sealed note, going out again immediately.

The clerk glanced at it and was about to put it in the letter rack, when on a second look he said:

"Why, this is yours, young man; it is for Billy Weston."

"That's me," and Billy eagerly grasped the missive. Glancing at the writing, Billy saw that it was in Skinny's well-known hand.

"He's alive, anyhow, for this is from him!" and tearing open the missive he read:

"BILLY:—

"Don't know how it happened, but guess I got up in my sleep And fell out the window, and suppose my light weight saved my Neck—woke up and found myself walking in the street—Good-natured night-watchman took me in, and Everything is all Right—bring my clothes and come to — dupont street at once and get me—can't get there with no clothes on—

SKINNY."

CHAPTER II.

SKINNY'S HIDDEN WARNING.

"WHAT does he say?" the clerk asked. Billy read the note aloud.

"That don't look reasonable," observed the gentleman who had called Billy's attention to the escape of the prisoner,

"What don't look reasonable?" queried the clerk.

"Why, that a boy could fall from the window without getting hurt, and much less without waking up."

"That is jest th' spot where it hits me, too," confessed the gamin. "Skinny ain't so heavy a sleeper that a fall from our window wouldn't wake him, if it didn't kill him. He's a light-weight, I know, but he wouldn't float down like a feather."

"But, then, how did he get out?" questioned the clerk.

"That's th' sticker," answered Billy.

"You know his writing?" asked the man with the paper.

"Yes, as well as I know my own."

"And this is his?"

"Sure. I'd know it among a thousand sorts. I don't see how his spellin' is so out o' plumb, though; and not his spellin', either; I mean his capitals, and way of puttin' in his points."

"May I look at it?" the gentleman asked.

"Of course."

Billy handed it over, and the man took a careful look at it.

"It is rather out of tune, in point of capitals and punctuation," he remarked. "Does your partner know how to write better?"

"Does he?" cried Billy; "I should smile. He is no slouch with th' pen, Skinny ain't."

"And you are sure this is his writing."

"Dead sure. Couldn't mistake it. Jest cast yer eye at that peculiar twist on the S. Couldn't anybody but Skinny do that."

"Well, if you are so certain on that point, may he not have had an object in putting it together as he has?"

"That is jest what I am tryin' to get through my hair," declared Billy.

The clerk requested to see the note.

It was given to him, but he could advance no worthy comment.

"Where is this Dupont street?" Billy asked.

"Why, let's see," reflected the clerk; "it takes in the Chinese quarter, I think. Yes, for I remember an incident that happened one day at the corner of that street and Jackson. I'm not well posted around there, though."

"Oh, well, no matter, for I can find out all about that."

"Are you going right over there?" asked the gentleman.

"Not in a very big rush," answered Billy.

"You are suspicious!"

"Rather."

"Then you think there is something back of this?"

"Say, who are you?" Billy suddenly demanded.

The gentleman smiled, and threw back his coat.

Billy saw there on his breast a detective's badge.

"Sweet pertaters!"

"I am Detective Dalworth, of the city police," the man informed the boy.

Billy's face took on a serious look, and he proceeded to say:

"I s'pose it's all right, mister, but in these times o' hard-knocks and tribulations a feller can't be too careful how he picks up acquaintances. I want some proof afore I take you to my bosom."

The detective laughed.

"You were not born yesterday, I see," he observed. "Will you take the landlord's word, when he comes down?"

"Yes, if he says you're true blue I won't carry th' case to any higher court, for I have sized him up."

"All right. No doubt he'll be around presently— Ah! there he is, now."

The proprietor of the house had just entered.

"Good-morning, Mr. Bondson," the detective greeted.

The landlord looked around and seeing who it was, responded:

"Ah! good-morning, Dalworth."

"Will you kindly tell this young man who I am?"

The proprietor looked from one to the other in a questioning way, as though wondering what was on the carpet now.

"Certainly," he answered; "you are a police detective."

"That settles it," cried Billy; "I won't look any further."

"Why, what's up?" the landlord asked.

"You know that lanky shadde of a partner of mine?"

"Yes; what of him?"

"Well, he's missing," and Billy gave the facts of the case.

"And this lad was a little suspicious of me, when I told him that I am a detective, but it is all right now," added the officer.

"That is rather a remarkable affair," the landlord observed. "Take hold of the matter, Dalworth, and see what you can learn."

"I'm going to do so," declared the detective; and turning to the New York gamin, he added:

"Let's go up to your room and talk the case over a little."

"Come right along."

They left the office and went up-stairs.

On entering the room the detective looked around with a practiced eye, but discovered nothing. He went to the window and looked out, but nothing was to be learned in that direction.

Broadway Billy's keen eyes had left nothing to be found by any one else.

"That boy could not have fallen down there without getting hurt," Dalworth decided.

"Jest what I say," assured Billy; "not ter mention his not wakin' up."

"Well, let's talk this affair over."

"Kerreck. Sit right down, sir, and you'll find that talkin' is one of th' fine arts that I am proficient in."

"I have already discovered that, my lad; words roll out of your mouth like oil out of a jug."

"Oil take that fer granted," Billy punned. "I reckon it's more like rattlin' beans in a gourd-shell, though; more sound than sense. But, say, how did that Sharkey Dan git away?"

"Why, he was in the hospital, you know, where that bullet of yours put him, but I guess he wasn't as bad hurt as he pretended to be. Anyhow, he got up and got out of there, and that's the last we know about him."

"He's a cool one," Billy declared. "He's hurt, though, and he won't be very active for some days to come. As fer his runnin' away, I don't think he's out of the city. No doubt he's got friends here that's lookin' out fer him."

"That's my idea. I only wanted to see what you would say, when I told you I had an idea that he was far away from here by this time."

"And what brought you here?" Billy asked.

"I came here to see you."

"M!"

"Yes. You have helped us once, and we want you to help us again. You know this man Bingham, it seems, and have captured him two or three times before, and naturally he has no liking for you. If he gets a chance he will no doubt try to work you an injury. We are going to keep our eyes on you, so as to be ready to nab him if he does try anything of the sort."

"I object!" Billy exclaimed. "I don't mean to pose as stool-duck for anybody. If you

want to help me find my partner, all right, and then I'll do my share in helpin' you git your prisoner back again; but I'll be salted and smoked if I'm going to play live-bait to your trap. Nixey; that ain't th' sort of a detective I am."

"But, you don't understand. If we can get hold of him in this way, all the honor of the affair will fall to you; and—"

"That's all right, but if you do that sort of work it won't be with my consent. I'm willing to take all th' risk of his doing me any harm. I've got more lives than two cats, and I'm going to play one of th' first fiddles or I don't play at all."

"Well, and won't that be taking a leading part?"

"You bet; it will lead you right to the front, if it happens to work your way. I don't want to be watched in every move I make, and I'll be skinned and dried if I'm going to be, either."

"Oh! well, we'll let that drop. If it's against your wishes, why of course we won't do it."

But this did not close Billy's eye to any extent. He knew that it was a cut and dried arrangement that he and Skinny should be watched, so that if any move was made against them by Sharkey Dan the police could come in and capture him.

Billy did not really look for any such event, but it was not at all unlikely, since Sharkey was his sworn enemy, and had now more reason than ever to want to put him out of the way.

"So you say," the lad returned, "but you can't blind me. It's all settled, I know; but hear me orate once: If you and your detectives kin foller me six hours, I'll give you my old clothes as fast as I'm done with them."

The detective smiled.

"Don't be so foolish as to think that we couldn't do it," he said. "We are aware that you are a keen one, but you don't want to forget that professionals are hard to beat."

"Well, we won't quarrel, anyhow," remarked Billy, "for I ruther like you, and don't want to get your ill will. What about getting my partner out of his scrape?"

"I'm ready to help you at that. We'll go and get a couple of policemen, and make a raid on this house he's in. If it's all right, no harm done; but if there is crooked work going on, then we'll nip it in the bud."

"And there is crooked work, that you can depend on," Billy declared.

"So I think, but we haven't proof of it yet. This note may be all straight, and your partner may have dropped from the window without getting hurt; though it was one chance in a million."

"And that's smaller than Skinny is himself. No, it wasn't anything of the sort. I've got proof, if you haven't."

"Proof!" the detective cried; "what is it?"

"Just look at this note again, and see what the capital letters spell."

Billy had been studying the note while they were talking, and had made a discovery.

The detective looked at it again, and spoke the letters aloud as they met his eye.

"D," he enumerated, "A, N, G— Why! they spell 'Danger'!"

CHAPTER III.

HOW SKINNY WAS TAKEN.

LIEUTENANT SKINNY was a much surprised youth.

He remembered retiring at a seasonable hour, with Billy, at the hotel.

Now, on awaking, he was being carried off somewhere in a carriage, and was in his nightshirt.

What did it mean? Into whose hands had he fallen? How had they taken him from the room without waking him? Why was he being thus carried away? What was going to be done with him?

At first he thought that he must be dreaming, but the cool night air soon put that idea to flight, for, thinly clad as he was, he felt decidedly chilly, and was as wide-awake as ever in his life. There was no dream about it, but grim reality, but he could not guess what it meant.

"Great ginger!" he exclaimed in thought, "what is th' meanin' of this, anyhow? Of all things queer and strange, this is about th' queerest and strangest that ever happened ter me. Land o' goodness! what will Billy say when he wakes up and finds his shadde missin'? Ther'll be a howl from room 21, and Billy will be th' howler. I bet he'll stir things up ter find me, and that's a fact, as he'd say himself. But, if I'm taken off in this style, how will he find me? What'll he think? This yanks th' cucumber right off th' vine, this does."

Only a few moments had elapsed since he had woke up, and he had as yet made no move.

He was in a closed carriage, and by the very dim light that found its way in now and then, he found that he had two companions, men.

"Say," he demanded, sitting up in the corner where he had been partly lying, "what is th' meanin' of this sort o' proceedin'? Where be ye takin' me off to in this style?"

A strong hand immediately grasped his arm, and a voice hissed:

"Shut up! Not a word out of you, or you die!"

If Skinny had not been wide awake before, he certainly was now, and that to the fact that he had fallen into dangerous hands.

"Yes, I know," he held on, with some of Billy's grit, "but, what is the reason of it, and so forth?"

"You will mighty soon see, if you don't keep still," the man at his side growled.

"And that's what I want," Skinny persisted.

"Say another word," warned the man on the other seat, "and we'll gag you!"

"Well, can't you tell a feller—"

Strong hands seized him, and before he could think of calling for help the lad found a gag in his mouth.

That stopped his tongue, but it could not stop his thinking.

Puzzle his brain as he would, though, he could not answer any of the questions that he had put to himself on first waking up, and which were still uppermost in his mind.

The two men said nothing, or next to it, and he could learn nothing from them concerning the riddle.

When the carriage had gone quite a distance, and had made numerous turns, it finally came to a stop, and on hearing a low-voiced "all right" from the driver, one of the men opened the door and got out.

The other man remained seated until the first had looked carefully around and had repeated the signal, when he lifted the boy and handed him out, following.

Skinny observed that they were in a rather dark street, and in a neighborhood that did not strike him as being very respectable.

He had little time for observation, however, for he was immediately carried into a house near by.

The lower part of the house was dark, but the reflection of a dim light was seen somewhere up-stairs, and the men carried him in that direction, finally throwing open the door of a room and depositing their prisoner on the floor.

That done, they bound his hands securely, and then went out and locked the door after them.

Not a word had they spoken to him.

"Great ginger!" the lad exclaimed in mind, "but I am in a fix now, sure as stars. I'd like ter know what they intend to do to me, and who they are. How in all creation am I to get word to Billy? This is enough ter make a feller wish he'd stayed at home and tended to business, as any one with sound sense would have done. Had ter be seasick fer weeks, and now that I'm ashore I can't be let alone yet. Things is comin' to a purty pass, I'm thinkin', when a feller gits stolen right out of his bed. I don't understand it nohow."

He thought he heard voices, and listened.

Yes, he did, and they were in an adjoining room.

Looking in the direction whence the sounds came, he saw a ray of light.

Getting upon his feet he moved cautiously toward it, and soon found that it came through a low chimney-hole.

There was a rag over the hole, but it was slit down the middle, and putting his eye to the slit the lad saw that there was another hole on the other side, open, and that a lamp was on a table across the room.

"Yer didn't bring him!" he heard a man exclaim.

"No," another answered; "but we got th' slim one."

"He be hanged! Why didn't ye bring th' other one?"

"Well, it wasn't safe. We almost lost our lives as it was, and I made up my mind that I wouldn't risk it no further."

The first speaker raved.

"A nice state of things you have made of it now, ain't you? When that lad wakes up he'll go over San Francisco with sandpaper but what he'll hunt us out and rescue his partner. You'd rather die, you had, both of you."

"That's all right," the other growled, "but you wasn't there and don't know nothin' about it. We've got a plan to get th' other one, though."

"And what is that?"

"We'll make this one decoy him here."

"How will you do that?"

"Make him write a note to him. Oh! a little brain work will fix it all right, and it's bound ter work."

"I doubt it; but we'll try it, since you've made a mess of this scheme."

"Don't you be uneasy about its not workin'?"

"It must work!" the first speaker fairly grated. "That boy has got to die. If his bullet had struck just a little nearer home, it would 'a' done for me. He's got ter pay fer that shot, and don't you forget it."

Skinny's ears were wide open for every word, and he mentally exclaimed:

"Great ginger! kin that be Sharkey Dan? If it is, he's escaped, and I bet I'm a goner."

The next words confirmed his suspicion.

"He'll die fast enough, Sharkey, and so will this one that we've got our hands on. We'll make one job of both of 'em."

"I'll believe it when I see it."

"Then you'll believe it in short order."

"He's a born terror."

"Billy, you mean?"

"Yes."

"I should say he must be."

"This ain't th' first time he tripped me. He's got in solid licks at me three or four times, now; but he's done his last. I'll kill him on sight, if I hang fer it."

"How are ye feelin'?"

"Oh, not so bad, considerin' that I've got a bullet in me."

"Then they didn't get it out?"

"No, I didn't wait ter give 'em time."

"You was mighty lucky ter escape. Must take extra care that they don't git hold of ye ag'in."

"And I'll try ter do that. But, how did ye git at th' boys?"

"From th' winder of th' warehouse next to th' hotel. We know th' watchman there, and he's one of us sometimes. For ten dollars he helped us out."

"Then I can't see why you didn't make one job of it."

"I told ye why. It was too risky. Ye see, the winders ain't on a level, and ain't opposite of each other. We watched from 'em to-night, till we seen th' lads go' ter bed, and then when th' time was ripe we went fer 'em."

"How did ye git across and back?"

"We put a board across, and I went over while Ben held it."

"And if ye made one trip why couldn't ye make two?"

"Didn't dare to, jest as I've said a dozen times. It was risky enough ter walk down th' board to th' winder, and git in; but after I'd used th' sleep-stuff on th' lads, and got th' lightest one up in my arms, I tell ye I was 'most afraid ter git out on th' plank again. I started, though, and my hair was on end. It was up hill, and my legs felt as weak as rags. If I slipped it was sure death. It was inch by inch all th' way, fer I didn't dare go no faster, and jest as I got to th' winder I did slip, and only fer Ben and th' watchman I'd 'a' gone down."

"Well, it was ticklish, I suppose."

"Ticklish? That ain't no name fer it. It was more than ticklish. They got me in, though, and I told Ben to pull in th' board. I wouldn't 'a' gone back over it fer ten thousand dollars spot cash."

"Don't know as I kin blame ye, come ter think of it."

"Of course ye can't. You would 'a' done just th' same. Well, as I was a-sayin', or goin' ter say, th' watchman closed and locked th' shutters ag'in and here we be."

"I'm only sorry fer one thing, now," muttered Sharkey.

"And what's that?"

"That ye didn't use th' knife on both of 'em and leave 'em there."

"I don't know but you're right."

"Joo did mention it," spoke up Ben, "but I said better git 'em alive, as you had ordered."

"It don't a heap matter," put in the other, "fer we'll soon have 'em anyhow, now."

"But how is that to be worked?" inquired Sharkey.

"By a decoy note, jest as I explained."

"I know, but won't that make th' lad suspicious, sc he'll fight shy? Mebby he'll bring police with him."

"We must look out fer that. We'll watch him, and if anything of that sort happens he won't find us at home."

"It won't do ter bring him right ter this house," cautioned Sharkey, "fer I ain't in condition ter do any tall hustlin' out. We'll give

him a number across th' street, and if he comes, and we see he's alone, then we'll nipper outer him."

"No, that won't do, fer it will be daylight. He must come here, but we'll keep a sharp lookout, and if he shows any signs o' 'spicion we'll scoot."

CHAPTER IV.

SKINNY'S WITS AT WORK.

SKINNY heard a good deal more, but there is no need to quote it all.

The matter was discussed at length, and finally plans of action were agreed upon that were satisfactory to the three.

The points Skinny had got hold of were, in brief, these: Sharkey Dan had got away from the police; had found his friends, and had induced them to rid the world of Billy and Skinny; they had made an attempt to kidnap the two lads, but had met with only part success.

Now the work had to be completed. They would oblige Skinny to write a decoy note to Billy, and bring him into their hands. That note would be sent by messenger, and a watch would be put on the hotel to learn what action Billy took upon receiving it. If there were any signs of danger, then the birds would fly in all haste to other quarters.

Of course the newspapers had given Sharkey and his friends the information as to where the boys were stopping.

The conference finally came to an end, the light was turned down, and the men prepared to sleep.

"Great ginger!" Skinny exclaimed in mind, as he moved away from the chimney-hole, "but this is a state o' fix ter be in. I'm in fer it myself, and they're bound that I shall git Billy into th' same boat, too. That don't agree with my system, no way it kin be fixed. If I must write, of course I'll have ter, but I'll work in a word of warnin' or bust a-tryin'. But, how in all creation be I goin' ter do it? If I had only Billy's thinker on my shoulders fer about five minutes, no doubt I'd be able ter make up some sort o' skeem. It is a sticker, an' that's a fact. If I could do it in five minutes with his head-piece, though, I'd orter do it in as many hours with my own. I'll see what I kin think out."

He put his mind right down to it.

But there were difficulties in the way. How could he tell what he would be required to write? If he wrote more than he was told, he would arouse suspicion, and perhaps bring his career to a sudden and untimely end.

No, he would have to write whatever they dictated, and anything that he put in secretly, would have to be done in the manner of writing the whole. It was no easy thing for the lad to undertake.

Finally he fell asleep, with a dozen different plans in mind, none of which he had fixed upon as the one.

When he awoke it was just daylight, and a man was standing over him, shaking him roughly with his foot.

"Come, wake up, you skinny skeleton!" the man was exclaiming.

"All right, I'm awake," Skinny answered; "no need ter shake me all apart."

The gag had been taken from his mouth.

"It would not take much ter do it, I guess," the man retorted. "Come, though, we want ter use ye."

"Did ye bring my clothes along?" Skinny demanded.

"No; but you won't need any where you're soon goin'."

"Can't say that I fancy this goin' around in undress uniform."

"No matter, you git up and foller me."

"There ain't no ladies around, is there? I'm as bashful—"

"Shut your head and come on, or I'll give you somethin' ter remember!"

"All right, I'm with ye."

Skinny followed, his lean shanks shining below his night-shirt like polished pipe-stems.

His conductor led him into the adjoining room, where Sharkey Dan was in bed, the other man lying on a lounge.

On the table a lamp was burning, for it was hardly light enough yet to see plainly without it, and near it were paper, pen and ink.

"Set yerself down there," the man ordered, "and write what I tell ye."

Skinny sat down, but his brain was in a whirl. How was he to warn Billy to look out for danger? To say more than one word was impossible, and that word must be right to the point.

Suddenly the idea came to him. Whether it was something that he had thought out pre-

viously, or whether it was new, he knew not. It was there, and he brightened up at once.

"Sling out yer message," he invited, "an' ye'll soon see it on paper."

"All right, and mind that you don't write anything else. I'll read it when you are done."

"My eddycation ain't very monstrous broad," Skinny apologized, to cover his little scheme, "but I'll do th' best I kin."

"And that's all that we require. Of course your partner will know your handwriting, won't he?"

"Every time, sure pop."

"Good enough. Now, dip yer pen and git ready."

The man went ahead, then, and dictated the message that has been shown, and as Skinny wrote he avoided putting in any capitals whatever except the six needed to spell the one word—

"DANGER."

It was a clever trick, and cleverly executed.

He wrote fast, and the man who dictated could have no suspicion that such a scheme was being wrought right under his very eyes.

As soon as the work was done the man took the note up and read it over aloud, and discovered nothing.

"Is that all right?" he asked.

"Yes, that'll do," said Sharkey.

"Then I'll be off and set th' ball a-rollin' without any loss o' time. This must be done right away, ter be of any good."

Skinny was put back into the room from which he had been taken, after his hands had been tied again, and the man with the note left the house.

The lean lieutenant applied his ear again to the chimney-hole, to catch whatever might be said.

"I don't like th' looks of this game," he heard Sharkey Dan remark.

"Why not?" asked his companion.

"Cause it slipped up on th' plans that I helped you fellers lay out. I tell ye that I won't know no peace o' mind till I see that boy dead."

"You'll have peace o' mind soon, then, for as soon as we git our hands on him ag'in he will be a gone goose."

"I hope so, but I'm uneasy."

"Only fer him, we might all be swimmin' in th' boode of that bank, now."

"Yes, an' th' other poor fellers wouldn't be in th' lock-up. It'll go hard with them. Oh! curse him! how I'd like ter have my hands at his neck! I'd pay him up fer this bullet that he put in me, you bet!"

So they talked on, and Skinny's blood ran cold as he listened.

It did not seem that there was any hope for him, whether they got hold of Billy or not.

In about an hour heavy steps thundered on the stairs.

Skinny thought it must be the return of the man who had gone out with the note.

And he was not mistaken, for the man burst into the front room.

"Ther game is blocked!" he cried.

"What's up?" demanded Sharkey.

"Ther feller must smell a mice. He's in with ther perlice, and they'll soon be down on us."

"Then we must git," decided Sharkey.

"How did it happen?" asked the one named Ben.

"What happen?" demanded Joe.

"I mean what is ther p'ints that you got on to?"

"Why, I sent the note in by messenger, and I follerred ther messenger, in disguise; and hang me if ther lad wasn't talkin' to one of th' reg'lar detectives and th' clerk about his missin' pard. He must 'a' took hold o' th' case in a hot hurry."

"That's him!" Sharkey declared.

"Well, I went out ag'in, and after quite a time th' lad and th' detective kem out and started off. That's all I know, but that's enough fer us."

"You're right. Is everything ready?"

"Yes; but what about th' lad? Shall we kill him and leave him here?"

"No," cried Sharkey, "that won't do. If they git us, we'd swing fer that. It must be done in a way that won't git us inter trouble."

"Then we'll have ter take him with us."

"Yes."

Skinny's hair had stood on end at the suggestion that he be killed, but he breathed easier now.

"Great ginger!" he exclaimed under his breath, "but that was a startler. I wish I's back at that corner-stand in New York. Bet I'd know enough ter stay there. Seems I'm goin' ter be moved, and how'm I ter leave any clew fer Billy?"

He was greatly puzzled to know.

In the front room all was confusion.

The three men were getting ready for a hasty departure, and were helping Sharkey Dan to dress.

Skinny's hands being tied, he was indeed in a dilemma. Only for that fact, he had a plan that he thought might work. The undershirt he had on was white, and he might take it off and write something on it with soot from the chimney.

But, that was out of the question now, for there was no way to get his hands loose, and the work must be done in a very few moments, if at all.

Suddenly another thought struck him.

His feet were free; could he not blacken them with soot, and so write his name on the floor?

No sooner thought of than put to the test.

He pushed his right foot through the muslin over the chimney-hole, having no fear that he would be overheard, with so much confusion in the other room; and after wiping it around in the chimney for a moment he drew it out as black as could be desired.

"Bully!" he exclaimed, "and I'll load up t'other barrel too, while I'm about it."

The other foot was soon blackened, and, stepping across to a point behind the door, he printed on the floor:

"GONE. SKINNY."

That done, the lad noticed that he had made black tracks on the floor, and a new thought came. Could he not leave a trail? Stepping back to the chimney, in the same tracks, he blackened his feet anew, and was ready to leave his mark wherever he went.

A moment later the door of the room was thrown open, and he was ordered to come out quick—quick with a strong adverb; and as he was right by the door he promptly obeyed, and his little trick was not discovered, then.

CHAPTER V.

BILLY HOT ON THE SCENT.

BROADWAY BILLY smiled a broad smile. He was pleased that he had got ahead of the detective.

It tickled him that he had been the first to discover the secret warning in Skinny's note.

"Yes, that's what it says, danger," he affirmed, when the detective had made it out under his directions.

"That lad is a smart one," the detective commented.

"He's as smart as he's thin," Billy declared stoutly. "There's no flies on Skinny, nary time. He's smarter than I really thought he was. This is a cute trick, if I do say it myself, and no doubt he's done it right under th' noses of th' fellers that's got him in bondage."

"Then you think he is a prisoner, eh?"

"Why, cert. He wouldn't say danger unless there is danger. That gives th' blunt lie to th' note itself."

"But, what does the word mean?"

"It's a warnin' ter me ter go a little slow, I take it."

"Perhaps it means that he is in danger himself."

"Of course he is. I know that, an' all th' more reason why I should be on the hump ter git him out."

"Well, let's be going."

"I'm with ye."

They left the room and the house, and set out for a police-station.

When they had gone, a man who had been watching the hotel set out rapidly in another direction.

Neither Billy nor the detective saw him, and would have paid no attention to him if they had. They had no thought that they were being watched.

"It is allus my luck ter be gettin' inter jest sich consarned diffikilties," Billy growled, as he and his companion went along. "It is Skinny this time, though, but it is all th' same. He's my partner through thick and thin—a good deal more thin than thick, too. Some folks seems ter have a streak o' luck cut out for 'em, and this sort o' business is mine. No knowin' where this thing is goin' ter end. It is a puzzler ter try ter figger how Skinny got out of that room, and th' why for of it all."

"No doubt we shall soon learn all about it, now."

"I hope so, anyhow. Skinny is in greater danger than you may think."

"How is that?"

"Why, he's only in his night-shirt."

"And how does that fact increase his danger?"

"Why, there ain't much heft ter him, even when he's got all his clothes on, and he has ter carry shot in his pockets so's th' law o' gravitation will have somethin' ter git hold of; but now that he's at th' mercy of th' wind, and th' lunar traction—as th' book says, I don't know what's ter become of him."

"Is he so very thin?" the detective asked, laughing.

"Thin!" cried Billy; "why, he's only a wafer. You never saw such a freak o' Nature in your life. He's always been so, too. When he was six months old he was lost for a week. Nobody could find him. His pop and mom hunted th' whole house over with dust-brooms and miker-scoops, but couldn't find a shadder of him. They gave it up, and mourned him as lost. Skinny's dad was a great smoker. After th' loss of Skinny th' old man's pipe wouldn't draw good. At last he got mad and smashed it on th' floor. When th' stem of th' pipe broke, out crawled th' lost baby. Oh! he's th' thinnest lad on record, my partner is."

"Any thinner than that story?"

"Thinner than that? Why, that ain't a circumstance. Once when he was about ten years old—"

Billy thus started off into another yarn, but before he could finish it they were at their destination.

The detective made known what he wanted, and two policemen were sent out under his charge.

Of course they lost no time in going to the address given in Skinny's note, and they made no pretense of going in secret.

Arriving at the house, which was found to be in a none-too-savory neighborhood, one of the policemen knocked loudly at the door with his club.

There was no response from within, and no sound was heard save the echo that came back to them.

They knocked again, and still no response.

The detective then tried the door.

He found it unlocked, and they went in.

The hall was bare, and the first thing to catch the eyes of the party were the black marks of bare feet on the floor.

"Sweet pertaters!" cried Billy, "here's th' trail of a chimby-sweep, anyhow. What d'ye make out of it, Mr. Dollarsworth?"

"Dalworth," the detective corrected.

"Yes, I knowed it was 'worth' somethin', but it slipped me."

"Some one with wonderfully smutty feet has passed along here," the detective commented.

"Right ye are," cried Billy, "and ten to one it was Skinny."

"Why do you think that?"

"Notice how slim th' track is."

"That's so."

It could be seen that it was the imprint of a lean foot.

"I'll see where these tracks lead to," the detective said, and he started toward the rear of the hall, in which direction they trended.

"And I'll see where they come from," echoed Billy, and he started up-stairs.

One of the policemen followed him, the other going with the detective.

The tracks were easily followed, especially so in Billy's direction, and they led him to the room in which Skinny had been confined.

There be discovered, first, that they commenced at the chimney-hole.

"Sweet pertaters!" he exclaimed, "this chimby must be awful narrow in th' flue."

"Why so?" queried the officer.

"Cause Skinny has crept through this five-inch pipe-hole and tried ter escape that way. He had ter back out again, though, and here's his trade-mark all over th' floor."

"You don't really think that he went in that hole, do you?" demanded the policeman, in amazement.

"You never seen Skinny," was Billy's only response.

Of course he was only joking, as he could not help doing. It was as natural with him as eating.

Suddenly another exclamation escaped him.

He had discovered the words Skinny had printed in black on the floor.

"Sweet pertaters!" cried the ex-gamin, "look here. What d' ye make out o' this? It is Skinny's sign-manual, sure's you're born. I'd know his signature, even if he dipped his head in a bucket o' tar and wrote it with that. He's been here, but gone. That's one good p'nt, anyhow. Skinny, you're a boss yet."

Having looked well around the room, and finding nothing further, Billy went out and entered the adjoining room.

Here was every sign of a hasty flight.

The bed had been occupied, and placing his hand on it the lad discovered that it was not yet cold. There was, too, a slight mark of blood here and there upon it.

On the floor, right by the bed, was a letter.

This Billy picked up and thrust into his pocket.

A nearly empty rum-bottle and glasses stood on the mantel; cigar-stumps were on the floor; and the remains of a meal were on a chair near the bed.

A further search around disclosed nothing of interest, and Billy went from that room to take a further survey of the premises.

He soon found that this room was the only one in the house that was furnished, and had just completed his hasty examination when the detective and the other policeman ascended the stairs.

"Well, what have you found?" the detective asked.

Billy told him about the words on the floor, and pointed them out to him.

"Which proves that that partner of yours has been here," the detective observed.

"Jest so," agreed Billy. "What did you find?"

"Why, I followed the tracks out the back door, across the narrow yard, through a gate in the fence, and on into the hall of the house on the other street. By that time they were getting faint, but we found still another trace on the sidewalk in front of the house."

"Good enough. That proves that Skinny went away from here alive, anyhow, and there is a good deal of satisfaction in that. Besides, it shows the way he went."

"And what is your idea about it all?" the detective inquired.

"My idee is that you made a big blunder," was the unlooked-for answer.

"A blunder?"

"Exactly."

"In what way?"

"In not comin' to th' hotel in disguise. I'll forgive you, though, for of course you couldn't know that Skinny had been spirited away, then."

"I don't exactly catch your meaning."

"I'll make it plainer, then. These birds took flight only a mighty short time afore we got here, and—"

"How do you know that?" the detective interrupted.

They had passed into the front room.

"Cause that bed there ain't cold yet," Billy informed.

Dalworth looked at Billy in surprise. The lad was more of a detective than he would have believed.

"Is that a fact?" he exclaimed.

"That's what it is," Billy assured, "and I'll tell ye what it proves: It is proof dead sure that you was seen to come to th' hotel, and that I was seen to come out from there in your company. Th' parties that sent that note wasn't fools enough ter give me a chance ter bring police help with me, and at th' sight o' you ther spy has come here in all haste and give 'em th' tip."

Billy had guessed the truth.

"By George! I believe you are right!" Dalworth exclaimed.

"I believe it too," declared Billy.

"And now what move is to be made?"

"I'll tell ye, and I'll give ye a p'inter," Billy answered. "We will part company, that's th' first thing; fer two is a crowd, with me, when I'm on a detective lay. I work best in single harness, every time. Th' next thing is, if you fellers want ter git hold of Sharkey Dan again, you want th' feller that occupied that bed last night. Now I'll bid ye adieu. Th' oracle hath spoken."

With that Billy turned on his heel and left the room.

CHAPTER VI.

COMES A CRY FOR HELP.

DETECTIVE DALWORTH was amazed.

He called after Billy in all haste.

"Hold on," he cried, "don't go off so like powder."

Billy stopped and turned back.

"What d' ye want?" he demanded.

"I want to ask a question or two."

"All right, fire 'em at me."

"How do you know Sharkey Dan has been here?"

"I don't know it, but I guess it mighty strong."

"Well, why do you think he has been here?"
"See th' remains o' that meal there on th' chair?"

"Yes, of course."

"Well, that indicates a sick man, don't it?"

"It may, perhaps."

"And perhaps that blood there on th' sheet near th' pillow, indicates that he was sick with a bullet in him."

The detective sprung to the bed and looked.

"Hang it, boy," he cried, "you have got the eyes of a hawk!"

"And a sick man, sick with a bullet-hole," Billy continued, "that has tried ter work harm ter my skeleton pard, is pretty perhaps Sharkey Dan. See? Now, anything more to ask?"

"Yes; where are you going now?"

"I'm goin' ter find Skinny, if it's in th' wood."

"And you don't want our help any further?"

"Not at present. I work better alone, as I said afore."

"Very well, but look out you don't run into danger."

"It's jest my luck ter run inter it, and I don't look fer anything else; but it won't be th' first time, and mebby I'll blunder out again. Mind that you don't try ter foller me, though, fer as sure as ye do I'll throw ye off th' track."

The detective smiled at that, and partly promised that he would not follow the lad.

Billy went on, then, and left the house.

He had barely left the room, however, when the detective pulled off his coat and reversed it, and hurriedly put on a wig and false beard of gray.

That done, he hastened down the stairs, and peering out cautiously, to see whether or not Billy was looking back, sprung out into the street and started after him.

A moment later Billy looked around.

"Sweet pertaters!" he muttered, "where did that old codger come from so soon? He wasn't on th' street a quarter of a minute ago, and that I know fer a fact."

He stopped short and looked back toward the house.

The old gentleman came right on, slowly, passed him, and turned the next corner.

Billy recognized him, though he pretended not to look at him.

"That's a cute dodge," he muttered, "but I have got onto his racket. We'll see how long he will foller me."

He stood still for some moments, looking back at the house, and presently the two policemen came out, closed the door, and went away.

"That settles it," cried Billy; "I'd suspect that th' old man is th' detective now, even if I hadn't recognized him."

He went on, and turned down the next street in the direction opposite to that the detective had turned.

Looking back a moment later, he saw a red-bearded man in a blue jumper coming along in the same direction.

"Sweet pertaters! Splinter my flying-jibboom!"

Billy was not fooled any. He now recognized the man's hat and trowsers, and knew that it was the detective.

"All right, he muttered, "now we'll have some fun. You just keep your eye on me, old boss, till I say Presto, change! and then don't look fer me any further. If I can't drop you I'll hang my harp on th' willers."

Billy struck out at a good pace and walked right around the block. Nor did he stop when he had made the circuit once. He kept right on walking around, all the time making a study of the buildings and general surroundings.

Glancing back now and then, he saw that the detective was after him.

When the circuit had been made four times, however, the detective stopped at a corner in disgust.

"Confound the young hound," he muttered, "he's got onto my game, sure."

In due time Billy appeared again, at the other corner, having made the circuit once more, and glancing up and down the street, saw his man.

"Ha! he's tiring of this sort o' fun, anyhow," he muttered.

He came right along, passed the corner and the detective without looking up, and went on around.

As soon as he had disappeared, the detective went around the other way. But Billy was not seen again.

Dalworth fooled away an hour there, and finally gave up in disgust.

Where had Billy gone to?

He had been taking in the lay of the land, so to put it, as mentioned, and as soon as he turned

the corner the last time, he dodged right across the street and entered the hall-door of a house.

He had noticed it open, and had made up his mind that it should serve his purpose.

He went right through the hall, out at the rear, and then took a look around.

A board fence surrounded the small yard in which he found himself, and the opposite building, on the other side of the fence, looked to be a store.

Billy vaulted over the fence, and made for the building.

It proved to be a wholesale store. The rear windows were barred, and the doors were locked.

Billy knocked at a door that seemed to be in use.

It was opened, presently, by a surly-looking man, who demanded:

"Well, what d'ye want?"

Billy pushed right in, as he answered:

"I want ter git out ter th' street, that's about all. I've got lost back here in this Chinese puzzle, and thought this was a likely way ter git through."

He had not stopped, but was moving right on through the store.

The man gazed after him in astonishment. This was something he was not used to in the way of cool cheek. But, then, he had never dealt with New York's type of Young American.

Billy went right on, coolly, and out the front way, and as soon as he was on the street he proceeded to put distance between himself and that neighborhood with all speed.

"There," he finally muttered, "how is that for a shake-off, Mr. Worthadollar? I told you I could do it, and so I have. Now, what's th' next piece on the programme? Must be doin' somethin' fer my country and Skinny."

He had paid little attention to the direction he had taken, not knowing the city anyhow, and when he came to look around he found that he was in the vicinity of Broadway and Front streets.

"Sweet pertaters!" he exclaimed, "here's a Broadway, eh? This makes me feel quite at home. Hang me if it's much like our Broadway, though. Seems like I've got into an Italian settlement."

And he had.

The Italian colony in San Francisco is numerous, and its fishermen wait upon the tides in this neighborhood. There are numerous Italian grocers, butchers, and restaurateurs.

"Wonder how many miles I've come?" Billy questioned. "I've had on full steam all th' way, anyhow. If I go much further here I'll take a bath, that's a sure thing. Guess I'll right-about-face, and amble off in some other direction."

He was about to do so, when something fell at his feet.

Stooping, he picked it up, and it proved to be a piece of paper wrapped over some small, irregular object.

Looking up to learn where it had come from, he could discover nothing to indicate in the face of the grim old building in front of which he was standing.

The windows were closed, and some of them had tight shutters.

Unfolding the paper, he found that it was wrapped around a small piece of a broken dish. It contained writing, in a woman's hand, but it was in a language that he could not understand.

"This comes of not knowing everything," he complained. "Now if I had spent as much time over th' languages as I have over attendin' to other folks' business, I might be able ter read this. Hang me if I don't think it would stump Inspector Br—Hello! there's more to it, though!"

The paper was a whole sheet, folded, and on opening it Billy discovered that it had writing on the inside, too.

This, too, however, was in some foreign language, different from that on the first page; but on the opposite side Billy recognized his familiar English.

"Ha!" he exclaimed, "this is better."

The writing was as follows:

"UNKNOWN FRIEND:

"I am a prisoner in this house—I know not where it is, put here by a cruel uncle. I am rich, but he is determined to rob me. Bring the police to my rescue, and I will reward you. Do not delay. My life may be in danger. If you read this where you find it, and will shout 'Hollo!' once, loudly, I will display my handkerchief at the window of the room where I am."

"ISIDORA CANTATRIZ."

"Sweet pertaters!" exclaimed Billy, "here's a go. Now I've got a sort of a double case on hand. No maiden in distress ever appealed in

vain to me, and this one won't; and there's Skinny ter be found and got out o' his diffikilt. What in th' name o' seventeen wonders am I goin' ter do? Wish I had some of th' stuff in my head that folks calls brain."

He read the missive over again.

"She's got brain, anyhow," he reflected. "If I shout hello, she'll show me where she is. That ain't bad at all. I'll paste that inter my hat. That's more'n I'd a' thought of in th' same fix."

He put the paper into his pocket, and crossed the street, and stopping where he had a good full view of the front of the house, shouted:

"Hello!"

Everybody around looked at him in amazement but he cared nothing for that. He had his eyes fixed upon the house across the way, though at the same time he was holding his head down so that no one could note in what direction he was looking.

Some seconds passed, and nothing was seen at any of the windows. In another moment, however, Billy's eye caught something white at a window of the adjoining house. This house was smaller, had an awning stretched in front, and all the windows above the awning, save three, were closed with tight shutters. Through a half-moon circle in one of these shutters, fluttered a handkerchief.

CHAPTER VII.

THE LEAN LIEUTENANT'S TOGA.

WHEN Skinny emerged from the room a rough hand seized him.

He was hurried along and down the stairs in all haste, and down the hall.

It was the man Joe who had hold of him, while Ben was assisting Sharkey Dan along.

They passed through the rear door, out into the small yard, on through a gate and across another yard and into a house.

Passing hurriedly through the hall of this house, Sharkey Dan was led out and helped into a carriage that was waiting. Then Ben returned with a horse-blanket, which was thrown around Skinny, and he was led out and helped into the same vehicle.

Without any waste of time they were off.

Skinny was allowed to remain wrapped in the blanket, for which he was grateful enough, for he was decidedly chilly.

"Say," Sharkey demanded, as they rode along, "what brought that infernal boy detective, Broadway Billy, to California?"

"A big three-master," Skinny answered.

"Don't try to be smart," Sharkey cautioned, "or I'll tickle yer liver with a knife. I mean, what business brought him here?"

"We started out ter have a little pleasure excursion," Skinny explained, "but I haven't seen any of it yet."

"And ye won't, either," Sharkey vowed. "You'll never see New York again, my thin-boned skeleton."

"It was a sorry day when I left, then," Skinny lamented.

"You kin bet yer life it was."

"I'd like ter bet you a two-cent piece, though, none th' less," Skinny asseverated.

"Bet on what?"

"I'll bet that you don't git Billy as easy as ye did me."

"We'll git him all th' same, though."

"You want ter look out that it don't work th' other way. Billy is jest a terror when ye git him started, and I'll bet that he's started now, with his war-paint on."

"No matter, his name is Dennis."

"And I s'pose mine is Mud."

"You bet it is."

Sharkey then turned to Joe, and asked:

"Where are we goin', Barbley?"

"I've got a den that I hired for a special purpose," Joe answered, "and we'll go there."

"Is it a safe place?"

"You bet it is."

"All right; anywhere till I have time to brace up."

After a time the carriage moved at a slow pace, and then stopped. It went on again, through a dark way for a little distance, and then stopped finally.

Ben Jarrold opened the door and got out.

They were in a dark alley between two buildings, and under the beams of a floor overhead.

No one was around, and Skinny was hustled out, and after him came Sharkey and Joe.

It was a dismal-looking hole they were in, and Skinny's heart sunk to zero.

He never expected to see his partner again.

Ben settled with the driver, who immediately proceeded to back his team and carriage out of the place, and Skinny saw that at the street the alley was shut in by big doors.

He had little time for observation, though, for Ben grasped him and hurried him along.

Now, minus the warm blanket, he was shivering as with a chill, for this closed alley was cold and damp.

They hurried along, and a few steps brought them to the end of the alley, and there they entered a door.

This opened upon a narrow hall, almost as dark as night.

Along this they passed for a long distance, as it seemed, and finally ascended a stairs.

Here, at the top, was a locked door, but Ben had the key, and after a moment's delay they went in, Joe locking the door after them, he coming in last, and putting the key into his pocket.

Skinny's heart was beating hard and fast.

He could see, here, and found that he was in a bare and miserable-looking hall, at the other end of which was a window.

He was led forward roughly to the front part of the hall, and thrust into a room, the door being locked upon him immediately.

Listening, he found that the three men entered a room on the other side of the hall.

"Great ginger!" the thin youth ejaculated, "but I am havin' th' adventure rubbed on purty thick this game, and no mistook about that. Wonder where it's goin' ter end? Oh! if I could only get word ter Billy how soon he'd be round these diggin's with his war-club in hand. But, I can't, and he'll never find me. I guess I'm a gone gosling. Whew! but it's cold! I wish I had my clothes on. This is a nice state o' dress ter be in, ain't it? I'm as hungry as a wolf, too. Hope they'll feed me, when they find time. What sort of a den am I in, anyhow?"

He looked around to ascertain.

The room was very dimly lighted, the little light it had coming through two holes in the tight wooden shutters.

It was unfurnished, and as bare and barren as a deserted barn. It was anything but cheering.

Skinny could hear the men talking on the other side of the hall, but could not distinguish any words.

He tried to get up to one of the holes in the shutters, to look out, but he failed. It was not to be accomplished, with his hands tied as they were. The holes were too high up, and there was nothing to stand on.

"If I'd growed a foot longer, while I was about it," the lad mused, "I'd be all right. As it is, I'm all wrong fer this job. I give it up. Guess I'd better put on my thinkin'-cap and see what's goin' ter be done about this matter."

Presently the door was opened and Joe Barbley entered.

With the door open, the hall window made the room pretty light.

"Well, what d'ye think about it?" Joe demanded.

"I think it's mighty cold," Skinny answered.

"That's cause you ain't dressed. You needn't let that worry you, though, fer you'll be colder afore many hours."

"Can't ye send around fer my clothes?" Skinny asked, "and furnish me with a square meal? I'm most starved."

The man laughed.

"Death will correct all that," he said, coarsely. "I want ye to write another note to that pard of yours."

Skinny jumped at the chance.

"All right," he said, "I'll do it. I s'pose you want ter git him in th' same fix I'm in. I don't care, though, he's no better than I am. I'll be glad ter have company. I'll write th' note, if you'll allow me ter ask him ter bring my clothes with him."

"Very well, I'll do that. Come along."

He led the way to the room across the hall, Skinny following.

Entering, Skinny found himself in the presence of Sharkey Dan and Ben Jarrold, in a room that was plainly and scantily furnished.

Joe closed the door, and freed Skinny's bands.

"Now," he said, "there's paper and pencil on ther table; jest set down and write off what I tell ye."

Skinny sat down and took up the pencil.

"Shoot off yer mouth at me," he directed.

"Well, write this: 'I am still a prisoner, but now in a new place. Have got my hands free, and write this to drop it from th' winder. Found paper and pencil in th' room. I don't know where I am, but whoever finds this and brings it to you, kin tell you near enough so as you can find me. Come and rescue me as soon as you can, for my life is in danger.' There, that's all; now sign yer name to it, and add yer post-mark about bringin' yer clothes."

Skinny had rattled right along, for he was a fast writer.

"I reckon you mean post-script," he observed, "but it's all th' same in high dog-Latin. There," jotting down a few more words, "see if that fills the bill."

Barbley took the note and read it over aloud.

"Yes," he said, "that's all right. Ha, ha, ha! You've signed yer pard's death-warrant, sure's you're born. You'll both be feed fer fishes afore many hours go by. You are softer'n mud, you are."

"That's all right," returned Skinny. "If I hadn't written it willin'ly you would a' made me do it anyhow, wouldn't ye? What's th' difference?"

"Well, that's so. Now let me tie ye up again."

"May as well be cheerful about that, too, I s'pose."

"Your head is level there."

"Say, though, can't you give me somethin' to put around me? This night-shirt is mighty light coverin' fer a feller as thin as I am."

"Let him take one of the quilts," spoke up Sharkey Dan.

There was a bed in the room, with some spreads on it, and following Sharkey's direction, Joe took one of them and threw it over to Skinny's frail form.

"There," he said, "that will keep you comfortable th' little time you've got to live, I guess."

The spread was a gaudy thing, made up of great yellow, red, purple, pink, and other colored patches, and when Skinny was arrayed in it his appearance evoked a laugh from the three men.

Barbley was about to lead him from the room when there came a rap at the door.

Joe's hand was on the knob, and he opened at once.

A homely old hag entered.

"Hello!" she piped, "what's so many of ye doin' here? What's this thing that ye have got wrapped in my best spread?"

"He's another prisoner, mommy," Barbley explained. "He's got no clothes on, so we gave him this. We'll make it all right with you. I'm goin' ter lock him in th' room across th' hall."

"Oh! all right, all right. Who's this feller?" indicating Sharkey.

"A friend of mine," Joe explained. "He's got hurt, and must keep out of sight till he's better. You must see to him, and we will see that you don't lose anything by it. Is th' girl safe?"

"All right, all right. Yes, th' gal is safe enough."

"That's good. Now you wait on my friend, see that th' prisoners don't get out, and keep mum, and you'll be rewarded. You know me."

CHAPTER VIII.

BILLY IN THE HANDS OF THE ENEMY.

"SWEET pertaters."

So exclaimed Billy at sight of the handkerchief.

"That's th' ranch where th' fair prisoner is, eh? Good enough, Isidora Matilda Susan, or what ever yer name is; I note the location, and I'll try and do somethin' ter git ye out. Must attend to my partner first, though. He's so much thinner than you probably are, unless you have been fed on scant bread and water fer six months, that a day's fast would dwindle him to nothin'. Can't permit that, ye know. I'd lose th' corfidence of Inspector Br— Hello! mebby I'd orter answer, so's she'll know that I see th' signal."

No sooner thought of than done.

Putting his hand to his mouth, fish-peddler style, he shouted:

"Hello! hello!"

Instantly the handkerchief gave a final rapid flutter and disappeared.

"What's th' matter with you?" demanded a voice at Billy's elbow.

Looking quickly around, Billy saw that the voice had come from a policeman.

"See anything th' matter?" he asked.

"What are ye shouting about?"

"If ye won't give it away I'll tell ye," said Billy, confidentially.

"Oh! I won't," the officer promised.

"All right, I'll take ye at yer word. Th' true facts of th' case, as the newspaper scribes puts it—fer they never deal in false facts, ye know; th' true facts of th' case is, I'm a professor—professor of phonetics, and I'm lookin' around fer specimens. I've got two jugs full already, and as soon as I fill another I'll be done."

The policeman looked a little dazed.

"You're a perfesser of what?" he demanded.

"I didn't say so," Billy corrected. "I said

I'm a professor of phonetics—acoustics—or, in plainer talk, sounds. I am looking for specimens to complete my collection."

Billy, as has been mentioned, was acquiring knowledge, having put himself down to hard study during two years. His spare time, when he was not under the hard grasp of his "detective fever," had been spent in poring over his books. When occasion required, he could drop his free and easy street patois at will. This by the way.

"It's my opinion that you're crazy," the officer declared. "That don't explain what you was shoutin' about."

"Dear me," Billy sighed, "some folks is hard of understandin'. I thought I was makin' it plain to ye. Fact is, I'm huntin' fer echoes. Every one I hear I try ter capture. Can't get an echo if ye don't holler, though, and hence and therefore is th' why of my hollerin'. D'ye see?"

"I see that you are probably a lunatic, and if I hear any more of your noise I'll scoop ye."

"Then you won't hear any more of it," Billy promised. "I'm done. With my best respects I'll call myself yours truly, and jog right along about my business."

With that he started off, leaving the officer gazing after him in wonder.

"That feller wouldn't tumble if a house fell on him," Billy muttered. "He didn't see th' signal at th' window, that's plain. It's jest as well, fer he'd only be pokin' his nose in where it's got no business. A policeman is handy when he's wanted, if he kin be found then; but where he ain't wanted he's the worst nuisance I can think of off-hand."

Billy had taken careful note of the street and number, and now walked away wondering what move he should make.

He had accomplished his object, throwing the detective off his track, but now what should he do? How was he to set about finding his thin partner?

There was but one way to do it, that he could see. That was to go back to that neighborhood and make inquiries. Some one certainly must have seen the persons go away from the place.

But, to go back there now might bring him under the eyes of the detective again.

He loitered around for a time, and when something over an hour had passed, from the time when he had first shook the detective off, he ventured to go back.

But it brought him little information.

He made thorough inquiries, but all he could learn was easily summed up. An old woman, living in the house through the hall of which the three rascals and Skinny had passed, said that she had seen them leave the house and enter a carriage that was waiting in front. The carriage drove off immediately down the street.

By questioning her Billy learned that there were three men in the party, one of whom seemed to be sick; and a boy. The latter had a horse-blanket wrapped around him.

The woman could give no description whatever of the team or carriage.

There the trail ended, almost where it had begun. Skinny was lost, and Billy was at his wits' end to know what to do in the matter.

It was now close to noon, the young detective was decidedly hungry, and he concluded to go back to the hotel and get his dinner. Possibly Skinny had by this time made his escape and returned there.

Having come to his decision, he set out, and in due time entered the hotel office.

"Has my shadowy partner returned yet?" he asked of the clerk.

"No," was the answer; "but here is another note from him."

"Ha! that's somethin', anyhow," Billy exclaimed.

The clerk handed the note to him, and tearing it open Billy read:

"BILLY:—
"I am still a pris'ner. But in a New place—have Got my hands free and Write this to drop from the window—found paper and pencil in the room—I don't know where I am but whoeveR finds this and brings it to you can tell you near Enough so that you can find me—come and rescue me as soon as you can for my life is in danger—bring along my clothes." SKINNY."

"Sweet pertaters!" Billy exclaimed, "they must think that my head is made o' putty. Why, a prize fool could see through their game. When they git me into this trap, let me know."

"Is it a trap?" the clerk asked.

"That's what it is," Billy declared. "I'll explain it to ye later, but jest now I'm interested in dinner."

Billy went to the dining-room, where he soon appeased his appetite, and then went up to his room for a little reflection.

Taking Skinny's note from his pocket, he read it a second time.

"A ten-year-old kid could see through it, now," he meditated. "Don't see what they's thinkin' about, fer this note don't agree with th' first one at all. That one was one thing, and this is another. Now he's a prisoner, and his life is in danger, which I reckon is true enough, if it is Sharkey that's got him. But, what about this secret word in th' note? Let's see what it is again. B, N, G, W,— that don't spell anything at all. No wonder I couldn't make it out. Let's see again. He's had ter take whatever word he could, as th' note was dictated to him, and he's started somethin' with a B. Then comes th' N. G. Why, that means No Good, that's sure. Let's see now, and leave them out. 'B, W, A, R, E.' Sweet pertaters! it spells beware, that's what it spells! Skinny says this note is no good, and tells me to beware. Bet yer life I will, my thin pardner. Oh! we'll git at th' bottom of it yet, if th' traces don't snap, and I guess they'll hold. We'll make Inspector Br— Hello! shoot me for a puddin'-headed know-nothin', if here ain't th' letter that I found in that room, an' I haven't thought of it since. Reckon it's about time I investigated it."

He drew it out in haste and read as follows:

"JOSEPH BARBLEY,

"No. — Dupont street:

"DEAR SIR:—All is now ready, and the girl must be taken away to-night. I suppose you have prepared the place for her, as arranged, I will pay the price agreed upon, provided that you do the work well. It must be done well. The girl is naturally timid, and a few days of such imprisonment will probably lead her to do as I desire. She must marry me, if she can be made to do that; if not, then she shall sign the papers. Come to-night at twelve.

JUAN CANTATRIZ,

"No. — Vallejo St."

"Sweet pertaters!" Billy cried, jerking the exclamation out with unusual vim, "but this is gettin' interestin', and that's th' fact. Two an' two's four; four an' four's eight. It's jest as plain as that. Eight an' eight's sixteen. That is ter say, ter wit, as follers:

"This Joseph Barbley is one of th' fellers that's got Skinny in th' toils. If not, how came Skinny in that house? That's th' place th' letter is directed to. Also, likewise, and ditto, said Barbley is helpin' Sharkey Dan in his diffikilty. Haven't got th' other feller's name yet. Then here's th' name Cantatriz—I won't pronounce it but I can read it good enough—that's th' name of th' girl that's a prisoner, and who has 'listed me in her service.

"Sweet pertaters! Splice my main-top-gallant-stay! I wonder if Skinny ain't in that same crib! What would be more likely? Nothin' that I kin think of, unless it is that he ain't there. If this Barbley had a sort of private jail already in use, why not drop my skinny partner into it when he had ter git him away from th' other place in such a rush? Hang me up by th' ears if I don't believe there's somethin' in this, and I'm goin' ter know."

The letter from Cantatriz to Barbley was dated two days previously.

Billy's first thought was to put it into his pocket again, but on reflection he concluded not to do so. Should he get into trouble, it would be taken from him. If he could rescue the girl, and put it into her hands, it would be worth everything to her.

"I'll leave it here," he decided, "and it will be safe. I won't leave this, though," taking his revolver from his pocket and looking to see that it was in working order. "I may need it in the worst kind of way."

Having put away the letter, and looked around the room to see that everything was in order, he went down to the office.

"Say," he asked of the clerk, "who was it brought this latest note?"

"It was a boy," was the answer. "You went off in such a hurry to get your dinner that I didn't tell you all I wanted to."

"Well, fire ahead now, then."

"The boy said he had found the note down on Front street, near No. —."

Billy smiled.

"It is too thin," he observed. "Their pole is jest too short ter knock th' simmon this time. If I don't show 'em a thing or two, then you can fire me out when I come back here, that's all."

He went out, and sauntered off in the direction of Vallejo street, having asked the way.

His plan was not yet formed, but he thought he would like to take a look at the residence of Juan Cantatriz. Perhaps he would go in and interview the gentleman.

In leaving the hotel he had taken no notice o a carriage that was standing on the opposite side of the street. That carriage followed him. Finally, at a lonesome point, two men sprung out of it, and walked hurriedly after the boy detective. In a moment they were up to him, and as Billy stepped aside for them to pass they suddenly seized him and he was bundled into the vehicle in all haste.

CHAPTER IX.

SHARKEY DAN EXULTANT.

THE old hag chuckled convulsively. Skinny thought for a moment that she was choking.

"Te, he, he, he! Oh, yes, I know you, Joe Barbley! All right, all right; I'll see to yer friend, and I'll take good keer of yer prisoners, too."

"That's right, mommy; they can't fool you any. I'd like to see any of 'em get away from you."

"Te, he, he! So would I, Josey, so would I."

"And I may bring another prisoner, too, mommy. If I do, and you serve me a good turn, it will mean a hundred dollars into your pocket."

"You kin trust me, Josey, that you kin. A hundred dollars would be a big sum fer a poor old soul like me. I'll 'arn it, or ye kin tote me feet first to th' sand-lots."

Barbley opened the door again, now, and pushed Skinny out, and shoved him into his prison-room.

The door was locked upon him as before.

"Great ginger!" the lad exclaimed, "but I guess I am in fer it, and that they mean real old business this time. Hope Billy will see th' word o' warnin' that I got inter th' note. It wasn't easy ter do it, this chance. Makes a feller use his thinker for all he's worth. I guess he'll see it, fer he is sharp, and he knows that I know how ter write better'n that. Wouldn't want him ter git inter th' same fix, nohow. I hope he'll take it to th' police and git their help."

He heard the men talking for a considerable time in the other room, but finally two of them, Ben and Joe, left the house.

The old woman was heard moving about, and in a little while the smell of coffee came to Skinny's nose.

"Sharkey is havin' his breakfast, I take it," he reflected. "I'd like most mighty well ter have mine. Reckon half the forenoon is gone."

After a time he heard the old hag ascend another flight of stairs, and unlock a door on the floor above.

Then he heard voices, but could not catch any words.

One of the voices, that of a woman, evidently, was in a pleading tone. The shrill, piping laugh of the old hag was mingled with it at times.

"That must be th' girl that Josey was askin' th' old dame about. Wonder who she is? What sort o' rascally business are they up to now? I'd ruther like ter know, but it strikes me that I have got about all I kin attend to in my own case. How in th' name o' big wonders am I goin' ter git out o' this pickle?"

The hours dragged by, and Skinny's hunger was becoming pressing.

He knew that it must be along in the afternoon, and he had not so much as had a drink of water since the previous night.

Finally, hearing the old woman in the hall, he kicked at the door and shouted out to her:

"Say, old lady, for th' love o' goodness give me somethin' ter eat. I'm jest about starved, I am, an' th' first you know you'll have a corpus on yer hands, which same will be me."

"Te, he, he, he!" came back her horrid laugh, "that won't hurt ye. I wasn't told ter feed ye, and I ain't goin' to. You'll keep till yer time is up, I reckon, my laddy."

"I wish it was you in my place, then you'd know how it is."

"But it ain't."

The old hag passed on down the hall, and her footsteps died away in the distance.

She had been gone but a short time, however, when th' tread of heavier feet was heard, and Skinny rightly surmised that the two men, Joe and Ben, were returning.

But he did not realize, nor suspect, the whole truth.

They stopped at the door of his room, unlocked it, and to Skinny's horror his partner, Broadway Billy, was thrust in, bound and gagged.

"Great ginger!" the thin partner ejaculated, "now we're done for."

"You never hit it straighter in your life," assured Barbley. "I have brought you com-

pany. Make th' most of each other, for before th' moon shines to-night you'll be over th' range."

"Hadn't we better bind 'em together?" suggested Jarrold.

"What for?" demanded Barbley.

"Why, you know what Shar—"

"Confound you! mention no names!"

"You know what he's said about this feller bein' a terror. Mustn't give 'em a ghost of a chance ter escape."

"Well, perhaps you're right. Get some rope."

Ben left the room, soon returning with some strong cord, and the two lads were placed back to back, and so bound.

It did not seem that there could be a possible chance for their getting out of the fix they were in.

"There," observed Barbley, "now you will keep. Don't waste any of yer few short hours, if ye have got any prayers ter say."

With that the two rascals left the room, locking the door after them.

"You're a fine one, you be," growled Skinny, in a low tone, as soon as the men had gone.

Being gagged, Billy could only wiggle to acknowledge that he heard.

"Now we're in fer it, sure, and I'd like ter know how you got into th' fix," Skinny continued to growl. "I'll see if I can't git that gag out o' your trap, so ye kin talk."

Billy gave a suggestive wiggle, as that was just what he desired.

"Hold back your head," Skinny directed, "and mebby I kin git hold with my teeth in some fashion or other."

Billy laid his head back over his thin partner's shoulder, and as it happened, the knot in the handkerchief that was used as the gag came right where Skinny could get hold of it.

In a few minutes the gag was removed.

"Sweet pertaters!" Billy exclaimed, in cautious tones, "what an awful thing it is not ter be able ter talk. I received your note, Skinny, dear, and I'm here ter rescue you, as per your earnest request."

"Great ginger!" cried Skinny, "you are in a fine fix ter talk about rescuing any one. What in all wonders did ye let 'em git hold of ye fer? Didn't ye see th' word that I worked into th' note?"

"Skinny," said Billy, solemnly, "I'm here because I'm a clam."

"I believe ye," Skinny declared.

Explanations followed, bringin' out the points that are known to the reader. Skinny was able to tell how he had been taken from the room in the hotel, and he gave Billy the information that Sharkey Dan was in the room just on the other side of the hall.

Some time was passed in earnest talk, comparing notes, and during that time the men were heard talking in their room.

Presently their door opened, and they stepped across the hall and unlocked the door of their prisoners' room and entered.

Sharkey Dan was with them.

"Ha! you hound!" he cried, shaking fist at Billy; "I've got ye on th' hip this time! Now I've got ye where I want ye! You've done your last bit of detective work in this world."

"That's about th' way it looks," Billy agreed, without seeming to be much alarmed, however.

"It's a dead sure thing this time," Sharkey assured.

"I don't doubt it. I'd ask ye if ye have any word ter send to yer friends in th' other world, but come to think of it I'm not goin' to th' same country."

"Ye're right in sayin' that; there's a special corner reserved in th' hot hole below fer sich as you be."

"He's got th' gag outen his mouth," observed Ben to Joe.

"So I see. He can't do much harm, though, I guess. We'll let him chin."

"Tbank 'e fer th' great privilege," said Billy. "Wish ye'd free my hands, too, fer I find that's somethin' I can't do."

"Ha, ha! No, I guess you can't. You wait till ter-night, and then we'll set yer little captive soul free altogether; hey, Sharkey!"

"It won't be no fault o' mine if we don't," Sharkey growled.

They retired, and the door was locked once more.

Sharkey had evidently come in to gratify his hatred with a look at his youthful enemy.

"What is goin' ter be done, Billy?" Skinny asked, when they were alone.

"Jest w'at I'm tryin' ter git through my hair, my gay an' festive thin partner," Billy returned. "It strikes me that th' most important

thing ter do is ter git out o' this den with all th' haste we kin."

"That's well enough ter say, but how is it goin' ter be did?"

"That's th' part that we've got ter figger on."

"It is impossible."

"Mebbe it is to you, but I don't know the meanin' of th' word. I have been in fixes as bad as this, plenty of times, and some of 'em worse; and I have got out every time. I'm never goin' ter say die till th' hangman gits his grip on me, and even then I'll want proof of it."

"Talk is cheap."

"That's one of th' reasons I indulge in it. Can't afford any of th' more expensive luxuries of life, ye know. Say, what is that thing you have got on?"

"It's a bed-quilt, or spread."

"I thought it was a kingly robe, th' brief look I had of it afore they tied us back to back."

"Well, what of it?"

"Why, I was jest a-thinkin'; is these cords tied around that?"

"Yes."

"Then a feller of your degree o' thinness, with no clothes on to speak of, ought ter be able ter slip out of the quilt—pardon me, the toga—and so enable us ter play somethin' else besides Siamese twins. I'm gettin' tired of it myself."

"Great ginger! why didn't ye mention that before? I never thought of it. I will see if I can do—"

"Hold on," Billy interrupted, "there's a stir on the other side of the house again. We'll wait and see what that means first."

The door of the room on the opposite side of the hall was heard to open, and two men passed down the hall and out of the house.

"That's Barbley and Jarrold," said Skinny. "They've gone out."

"All th' better fer us," cried Billy. "Now, my thin partner, wiggle, wiggle fer all ye're worth, and see if ye can't wiggle loose from me."

CHAPTER X.

THE JOLLY PARDS ESCAPE.

SKINNY began to "wiggle" accordingly. Billy stood as firmly as he could, to help their cause.

Finally the twisting and squirming on Skinny's part began to tell.

Billy felt the cords gradually loosen, and at last Skinny slipped out of the quilt and stood forth in all the glory of his night-shirt.

There was not much light, but there was enough to see, and at sight of his thin partner Billy had to laugh. He did so very moderately, however, for he had no desire to draw attention.

It was easy enough for Billy to shake off the bonds, now, and soon the lads were both free except their hands.

"We'll get there yet, Skinny," he whispered, cheerfully. "Jest set to work with your teeth and see if you kin free my hands, and then I'll loosen yours in no time at all."

Skinny was at the task immediately.

In a little time it was done, and Billy stood forth free once more, so far as the use of his tongue and limbs was concerned.

"Now fer yours," he exclaimed, and in a few minutes Skinny, too, was liberated.

"Rah fer our side!" Billy exclaimed in whisper. "We'll git there yet, my gay and festive lieutenant, see if we don't. We're as good as a dozen dead boys, and we'll prove it to 'em, too."

"But, we ain't out of th' woods yet."

"Right you are, but we're in better shape fer gettin' out than we was ten minutes ago."

"But, how are you going to do it?"

"Well, now, that's a sticker, so far as I'm concerned. It will be easy enough fer you, though."

"Why will it? How kin I git out any easier than you can?"

"Why, I'll stretch you a little, spit on you, and push you through the keyhole."

"I don't feel in no humor for jokin', or bein' joked at," Skinny scolded. "I am too awful hungry. You don't seem ter bear in mind that I have had nothin' ter eat ter-day."

"You wrong me, pardner, indeed you do. I am takin' that fack into consideration. It is your long fast that makes such a plan of escape for you feasible. No one could expect ter put a hearty dinner through a keyhole."

"If you can't talk sense, don't talk to me at all."

"Now, Skinny, that is cruelty ter animals, that is. If that were the law, I would be breakin' it every time I open my mouth."

"Pity it ain't th' law, then, with a penalty of twenty years attached."

"There, now, Skinny, dear, don't scold; I'm here ter rescue you from th' hand of th' enemy,

and I'm goin' ter do it, too, if I take off my buttons."

"And you can't spare any buttons; you're short some already. But, why don't you help me escape if that's what you're here for?"

"My thinkin' machine is goin' like a steam saw-mill, Skinny, and I am tryin' ter hatch some plan that will carry us out. If I only had brain ter think with, then it would be better. As it is, it is mostly up-hill work. Say, wonder if we can open that window?"

"There's one way ter find out."

"And that is by tryin', eh? Thank ye fer th' suggestion. Ye see, we have got no key to th' door, and if we go to monkeyin' with that, Sharkey might hear us. I wouldn't be afraid, if I only had my dissolver—I mean my revolver, but they took that away from me. S'pose they thought it wasn't a safe thing fer boys ter handle. Sharkey found it out so, anyhow. I guess th' window is our only hope."

Billy advanced to the window and looked at it. Then he tried to lift it, but the sash was fastened down.

Hunting around, he soon found what held it, and the cause removed, the window was raised easily enough.

The next thing was to open the heavy wooden shutters.

These, Billy found, were tightly closed, and he believed that they were nailed.

"It looks dubious, lieutenant, and that's th' fack," he observed.

"Can't ye bust 'em open?" Skinny asked.

"Might do that, I s'pose, but that would make a noise. Haven't got a knife, screw-driver, claw-hammer, or anything of that kind in yer pocket, have ye?"

"Folks don't have pockets in night-shirts," Skinny growled.

"So they don't. Beg your pardon, my gay an' festive youth. Hello! here's th' jigger that's doin' all th' mischief."

A little more than half-way up the shutter, was a bolt. Billy had not seen it at first—in fact, he had not much light, and when he did discover it, it was by feeling.

After one or two efforts this was drawn, and the shutters were opened.

They looked cautiously out.

Some feet below them stretched the awning that has been mentioned. This was lucky for them, for it would afford an easy means of getting down, if it would hold them. That had to be put to the test.

"Skinny, does it begin ter look like gettin' away?" Billy asked.

"Yes, th' way is all clear," Skinny agreed, "but I can't go out of here in this style. You must go and get me some clothes."

"Sweet pertaters!" exclaimed Billy, "but some folks is hard ter please. You must be crazy ter think of it. Jest suppose that case once. I go out and leave you here. While I'm gone my disappearance is found out. You would be put into irons, and when I returned I'd be gobbed up so quick it would make me dizzy. Oh, no, not any of that; not by a barrelful. You go jest as you are, if you want ter go with me."

"But, you can bring th' police back with you," urged Skinny, "and so scoop the whole set."

"It ain't likely. They'd fear jest that thing, and when I'd come back they'd most likely be gone."

"Then what am I ter do?"

"It's Hobson's choice; this boss or none."

Skinny groaned at the prospect. To go from this place to the hotel in his night-dress, or even with the gaudy quilt around him, was horrifying; but, what was he to do?

"Mebbe we can find a place near here where we can buy some clothes," he observed.

"Got any money?" asked Billy.

"No, haven't you?"

"Nary a cent. I had a few dollars, but that fellow Barbley took possession of it. That's out on interest, though. He'll pay for it, you bet."

Just then they heard the door at the lower end of the hall open, and knew that delay would be dangerous.

"Come, make up your mind double-quick," said Billy. "Our game may git nipped in th' bud if you don't."

"If I must I s'pose I must," said Skinny, dolefully, and he wrapped his gay "toga" about his slender form; "who goes first?"

"You can go first," answered Billy. "You are light, and I guess the awnin' will hold you. I might bu'st it, and then you would be left in th' lurch. Come, out with ye; no time ter dally now."

Thus urged, Skinny put his slender and shin-

ing bare legs over the sill, and dropped down upon the bagging awning.

The awning creaked and swayed, but it held, and Skinny rolled down to the edge of it and waited for Billy.

Seeing that Skinny was all right so far, Billy followed him, but he met with less favor. The awning gave a groan, gave a swing and a sway, and then fell to the ground.

Several persons happened to be under it at the time, and there was great excitement, as can be imagined.

Neither of the boys was hurt, and Billy got hold of his thin partner in all haste, and almost before any one could realize that they had been the cause of the accident, they were getting away from the scene as fast as they could.

They ran, Billy turning corner after corner in order to baffle pursuit if he could, and finally they were several blocks away.

But they were not getting along without attracting attention. Skinny's gay robe caught every eye, and people stopped to gaze after them.

When they stopped running, they still continued at a brisk walk, and it was not until they were half-way to their hotel that they took it at all easy.

Then the humor of the situation began to strike Billy.

"Sweet pertaters!" he exclaimed, "but you are a beauty, Skinny. I didn't know that you was half as handsome as you are. Dress is everything in this world, my gay an' festive fat pard, and this is jest th' outfit that you ought ter adopt. You'd make jest a boss Roman senator, and no mistake. Think I'll hire you out to pose on th' stage as th' citizen, though. Oh! but you—"

"Shut up, Billy, fer goodness' sake, and let's git along as fast as we kin. Everybody is lookin' at me."

"Don't wonder at it a bit," declared Billy. "You don't realize what a figger you are cuttin'—Don't be alarmed, ladies and gentlemen," speaking aloud to the crowd on a busy thoroughfare they had just come out upon, "it is harmless. This is Jabber-Wab-Swabber, chief of one of th' southern islands of th' Pacific. He is now in his hundred and fifteenth year, and has just come to the United States for the first time. He is—"

"Come on, come on," urged the distressed thin partner, pulling Billy along; "don't make a fool of me, if you must make one of yourself."

"Wouldn't think o' doin' sich a thing Skinny. I'd challenge ye ter fight, fer that sort o' talk ter me, if ye wasn't so thin. You'd have all th' advantage. I couldn't stick ye with a sword if I tried. You're too thin."

"And I'd like th' pleasure of stickin' one through you."

"No doubt about it, but you'll feel better when you get somethin' to eat and get your clothes on."

"How much further is it?"

"Not much; we'll soon be there now."

"I'm glad of it."

They were soon at the hotel, and as they entered Billy called out to the clerk:

"Th' dead is alive, th' lost is found. Behold! my gay and festive partner is arrayed in kingly robes. What d'ye think of him? Ain't he a daisy? Wouldn't he take th' first prize at—"

But Skinny would not stand any more. He broke away and ran to their room, and after Billy had stopped to offer a brief explanation to the clerk, he followed. When he entered the room he found that the lean lieutenant was already arrayed in proper attire.

CHAPTER XI.

A VERY CLEVER TRICK.

"SWEET pertaters!" Billy exclaimed, "but you have done th' transformation act quick, my gay an' festive shadder."

"Yes," Skinny agreed, "and now I want ter transport somethin' into my bread-basket. I am about starved. Don't I look thinner?"

"I believe ye do, Skinny, for a fack. A twenty-four hours' fast would reduce ye to a ghost, sure's ye're born. Ghost ter show that you should always carry a bite of grub in yer pocket, ready fer emergency."

"Ready fer eatin', you mean. But, that don't fill my locker now, and my need is pressin'. Where am I goin' ter git somethin'?"

"Well, seein' that you suffered considerably, my meager follower, I'll go out and bring you a dinner to the' room."

"D'ye mean it?"

"Of course I do. I'm mean enough fer anything."

"I'll be a thousand times obliged. I feel purty weak."

"Five hundred times obliged will amply pay me, my slender symptom o' starvation. You stay right here, and I'll soon be back. If ye feel a strong draft, jest grab holt o' the bed, so's ye won't get wafted away."

Billy left the room, and in about twenty minutes returned with a tempting meal for his hungry lieutenant.

Skinny thanked him, and set to work to put it where it would do the most good.

"Now, while you're fillin' in," observed Billy, "let's do some plannin'. I s'pose you have had enough adventure for one day."

"More than enough!" Skinny exclaimed. "I think you'll see a fellow about my size striking out for home before you are many days older."

"Sweet pertaters! No!" cried Billy. "I can't spare ye nohow, my light-weight chum. You mustn't get that notion in yer head. We are jest beginnin' ter have fun. I can't think o' partin' with ye."

"Then you'll have to come with me."

"Nixey. We haven't begun ter see th' sights. What I was comin' at, though, I s'pose yer want ter spend th' rest of th' day right here where ye kin take it easy."

"I believe you are right."

"Very well. I can't do that, however, fer I have got biz on hand. Sharkey Dan has got to be caged up, and that Spanish gal must be rescued. Now, what's your advice in th' matter?"

"I was thinkin' about that while you was out."

"Well, what's yer say on th' p'nt?"

"I think you had better see the police and go and raid that den as soon as you can."

"Kerreck. That's jest what I think. Mebby we'll git Sharkey and th' other fellers, if they haven't found out our escape and took to a new hole. I'll do that right off soon. Think that's what Inspector Br—— Hello! who's this?"

There was a knock at the door.

Billy opened it, and in stepped Detective Dalworth.

"Hello, Worthless!" Billy exclaimed; "how does yer heart beat?"

"Dalworth," the detective corrected.

"Beg yer pardon; knowed it was worth more or less, but forgot jest how ter hitch it up. S'pose you are satisfied now that I can lose you when it suits my convenience, ain't ye?"

"How did you do that, boy?"

"That's one of th' secrets of th' trade. It wouldn't do ter give it away, for I might want ter shake ye off again sometime."

"You couldn't do it again."

"Couldn't I?"

"No, sir."

"Don't be too sure about that."

"But, I am sure of it. I'll bet you can't."

"Put up yer rocks," Billy invited. "Skinny here can hold th' stakes. I'll bet ye a dollar that I git out of yer sight again afore night."

"Done. I mean to keep my eye on you for the rest of the day, and I'll take some of the conceit out of you."

The money was put up, and then Billy said:

"I've got some news for you, now."

"What is it?" the detective asked.

"I've run Sharkey Dan to his hole."

"Get out; you're joking."

"Nary a joke. Haven't I found and rescued my partner? Ask him if it ain't so."

"That's what it is," Skinny agreed.

"But, where is he?"

Billy gave the street and number.

"I wouldn't disclose it to ye yet," he added, "but as soon as Skinny's escape is known th' birds will light out for another roost. We must go there on the double-quick."

"You are right! Let's be off at once."

They set out immediately, after Billy had given Skinny cautions not to get into trouble during his absence.

Going to the police-station, the detective got three policemen, and they lost no time in making their descent upon the old house.

When they arrived there, however, they found that the game had taken fright and run to some other cover.

To that new place of hiding not a clew was to be had.

"That settles it," the detective growled, "they are lost now for good."

"Not by a bottleful they ain't!" exclaimed Billy. "I don't give it up yet."

"How do you hope to find them now? Where's your clew?"

"How did I find them before?"

"That's just what I'd like to know."

"And jest what I don't purpose ter tell ye.

I'll find 'em again, though, and I'll scoop 'em in, too, if it's in th' wood."

"We might have them now, if you had allowed me to help you."

"That's where you're wrong. If you had been with me I wouldn't have got th' clew that put me on to 'em."

"So you say."

"And it's the straight fact. I tell ye I work best in single harness, and that's th' way I mean ter work. Not that I want ter offend ye, fer I may have ter call on ye fer help, when I get th' game cornered. Till I do, though, I mean ter go it alone."

The detective was greatly nettled. He liked Billy, but he did not mean to let him get any more points ahead of him, if he could help it.

"You seem to forget our bet," he observed. "I do not mean to lose sight of you this day."

"All right," said Billy, "don't ye do it unless ye can't help it. Now I'm off, and ye want ter keep yer eye on me every second. If ye wink, ye may find me gone when ye unwink, so ye'd better keep yer eyes open wide all th' time."

With that Billy left the house, leaving the policemen in laughter and the detective looking rather blue.

But the detective was not left long, for he set out to follow.

As Billy went out of the house he observed a man standing idly on the other side of the street, and somehow his suspicion was aroused that he was a detective.

Detective Dalworth came out of the house a moment later, and Billy believed that he saw a signal passed between him and the man on the other side of the street.

"Good enough," the lad muttered to himself; "I may be mistaken, but it hits me hard that that feller is goin' ter help Worthnothing foller me. Reckon th' dollar I bet with him is as good as gone, but there's nothin' like tryin'. We'll see how it'll come out."

He set out up the street at a brisk pace, and turned corner after corner until he was satisfied that both men were watching him.

Dalworth was following him openly, but the other man was very cautious.

Their plan was simple. If Billy succeeded in dodging out of Dalworth's sight, the helper would still be on his track, and all Dalworth would have to do would be to follow him.

Billy had lined his pocket with some money, at the hotel, and now he wanted to purchase a new revolver.

He had noticed a shop where they were for sale, and made his way to it.

Going in, he made known his want, and bought a handsome weapon. Then he asked for two pairs of handcuffs.

"Py shimmey! Who you vas?" demanded the proprietor of the place, who was a Jew.

"Oh, I'm one of th' force," Billy answered.

Handcuffs were shown to him, and he bought two pairs.

Detective Dalworth was at the window taking note of it all.

"What are you going to do with those things?" he asked, when Billy came out.

"Oh! I may find use for them," Billy responded. "Mebby I'll have to put 'em on you and your partner, to keep you from dogging me around."

"My partner? What do you mean?"

"That's all right," said Billy, laughing; "don't forget that I have got two eyes in my head. I was brought up on th' streets of New York, and served 'prenticeship under Inspector Br—— Hello! Sweet pertaters! Furl my fore-topgallant-sail! if there don't go one of Sharkey Dan's friends now!"

Instantly the lad was in a state of intense excitement.

"Where?" the detective asked, eagerly.

Billy pointed to a man who was hurrying along on the opposite side of the street, a man whom he had never seen before in his life.

"Are you sure?"

"Dead sure," Billy declared. "I'm after him, like a shot. I reckon that dollar that I bet with you is a goner, but it can't be helped this time. I shook ye off once, anyhow, and I'll be satisfied with that."

The man was some distance away now, and Billy started forward on a run, the detective following at a sharp walk.

As it happened, the man turned the next corner, and so did Billy.

And there fortune favored the boy detective. It was his purpose to throw the detectives off his track, and this idea had come into his head

suddenly, and he had acted upon it, without any definite plan for carrying it out.

Just around the corner stood a wagon, with high sides, like an express-wagon. The horses were headed toward the way Billy was coming, and the driver was just taking up the lines to start. Quick as thought Billy sprung to the rear of the wagon, and, just as it started, leaped into it and lay flat down. It rattled off up the street at a lively speed, and when Detective Dalworth came around the corner, not two seconds later, Broadway Billy was not to be seen.

CHAPTER XII.

BILLY BEARDS THE LION.

DETECTIVE DALWORTH stopped short in amazement.

Not a sign of the boy detective, nor of the man he had followed, was to be seen.

The latter had entered a store at the corner, about the same time that Billy sprung into the wagon.

The detective allowed no time to be lost. A man was standing near, smoking a pipe in idleness, and stepping up to him the detective asked:

"Did you see a young lad run around this corner not a minute ago?"

"Yes, I opine I did," the man drawled.

"Where did he go to? Tell me quick, for I'm an officer."

"Why, he jumped into that wagon that jest went around th' corner."

"Thunder and lightning!" the detective cried, in rage, "he's tricked me after all! Did you see the man that came around the corner just ahead of him?"

"Yes, sir."

"What became of him?"

"He went into th' store here. He's Mr. Smith, that keeps th' store."

The detective raged around like a madman, and his helper coming upon the scene just then and asking what was the matter, was told to go to a warm climate. They were sadly disappointed, and felt their defeat keenly.

The wagon had passed them both, and as they were hurrying on after their youthful disciple in the detective art, but little had they thought that it contained the very person they most wanted to keep in sight.

Now the wagon was gone—they knew not where, and they had to make the best of the bad situation.

"There's one consolation, anyhow," Dalworth observed.

"And what's that?" asked his helper.

"It's a blessing that this lad is on the side of right, instead of an evil-doer. He would be a terror, as a criminal."

"You are right in saying that."

In the mean time, what of Billy?

The driver of the wagon was not aware that he had a passenger, until, when he had gone some distance, and had turned another corner, Billy got up and perched himself up on the seat.

"Hello!" the driver exclaimed, "where did you come from?"

"Oh! I've been stealing a little ride with you," Billy answered, "and thought I'd make myself agreeable. Stealin' ain't honest, anyhow, so if you say git out, why I'll simply git."

"Never mind, now that you're in. You don't lack fer cheek."

"Bet your life I don't. Say, though, which way are we going? I'm a stranger in this town, almost. I wanter ter find Vallejo street; are we goin' in that direction now?"

"That's what we are. I'll tell ye when we get there."

"Good enough."

"When did you get in th' wagon?"

"Jest as you started from the corner back there."

"That so? Well, no harm done. Who are you?"

Billy told all that was necessary, and so they talked on until at length the driver stopped and pointed out the street the young detective wanted to find.

"Greatly obliged to you," said Billy, in the way of thanks, and he set off up the street at once.

"No," he mused, as he walked along, "I'll try th' racket that I had in mind when I got gobbl'd up by Sharkey Dan's minions. I'll go and see Mr. Juan Cannedpotatoes, or whatever his name is. He's my last and only bolt, now. Sooner or later one of th' rascals will call on him, and then I'll be able ter take up th' thread and so foller to th' place where th' girl is hid."

"This is a clew that Detective Worthlittle don't know anything about, and I'm going to work up th' case on my own account. If I kin

only rescue th' gal, and at th' same time scoop in Sharkey and his pizen crew, I'll be as happy as a clam. Wonder what th' detectives think by this time about my not bein' able ter give 'em th' slip? Hang me if it didn't look dubious, but luck favored me, and I jest put th' halter on to th' chance at first blush. Reckon I'm all solid yet in th' confidence of Inspector Br—Hello! here's th' number I wanted ter find."

He was in a neighborhood that seemed to be made up of a considerable foreign element. These were Mexicans, Spaniards, and Italians, mingled with the Americans, and shops and saloons with foreign titles were seen.

Looking up at the house before which he had stopped, he found that it was one of respectable size and appearance.

It was a private residence, evidently, and had no shop or saloon under it, as many of its neighbors had.

"Now," Billy mused, "what's ter be done? How shall I proceed? Shall I wait here and watch? or shall I go in and see his jaggs? Reckon I'd better go in, fer mebby th' man has moved, and I'd only be wastin' time by waitin' here."

His mind was soon made up, and he mounted the steps and pulled the bell.

But no sooner had he done so than he exclaimed:

"Sweet pertaters! Here I've pulled th' tinkler, and I'll be hanged if I know th' feller's name. What in creation was it, anyhow?"

He scratched his head desperately, and while he was thus engaged the door was opened by a Spanish woman of middle age."

She looked at him, waiting for him to speak.

Billy saw that he was in for it, so he blurted out:

"Say, d'ye talk Untied States—I mean United States?"

"What do you want?" the woman asked, in fairly good English.

"That answers th' question, anyhow," Billy remarked. "Th' fack is, I have come here ter see a man, but hang me up fer a herring if I kin think of his name. Who lives here, anyhow?"

"Senor Juan Cantatriz," was the response.

"Sweet pertaters! so that's th' way it's pronounced, is it?—'Kantatreeh.' Reckon I'll never dislocate my jaws tryin' ter learn Spanish. 'Hoo-wan Kantatreeh.' Sweet pertaters, no! I'll never tackle that sort o' language. No wonder that th' name got away from me; couldn't hold fast ter that no time. It's gone a'ready. Yes, he's th' feller that I want ter see, I reckon."

The woman was smiling good-naturedly, as Billy rattled away, but it is hardly probable that she understood all he was saying.

"Do you want to see Senor Cantatriz?" she asked.

"Is he at home?" Billy counter-questioned.

"Yes, he is at home."

This was the main point that Billy was after.

"Yes; or that is ter say, I did want ter see him," the lad blundered ahead. "I don't know whether I do now or not. Have'most forgot what I wanted ter see him fer. Guess I'll see him, though, if I can."

"Come in, then," the woman invited.

Billy entered, and was told to take a seat on a chair in the hall.

"He has a caller now," the woman explained, "and you will have to wait."

"All right," Billy responded.

So he said, but he was far from feeling that it was all right. What if the mentioned caller should prove to be Joe Barbley?

The woman left him there, entering another room at the end of the hall, the door of which she did not close.

Billy was tempted to get up and get out, but he knew that any move he made would be heard by the woman, and a scene might follow. Finally he decided to stick it out and see what would come of it.

He heard voices in a room near the door of which he was seated, but the conversation was being carried on in Spanish, and he could not understand anything that was said.

He had waited twenty minutes, perhaps, when the door opened and two men came out of the room.

One was a handsome young man, a Spaniard, about twenty-eight years of age, of splendid make and noble form and carriage. The other was an older man, perhaps sixty, with a hard, cruel face.

Seeing Billy as they came out, the old man put a question, sharply, in his own language.

"Give it up," said Billy; "I can't speak Choctaw."

The young man laughed heartily.

"It is clear that you can speak English, however," he said.

"Yes, I can talk a little of that," Billy acknowledged.

"What do you want?" the older man asked, also in English.

"Pardon me," the young man interrupted, "but I will take my leave and then you can see what the young man wants. You promise me that you will send me word as soon as anything is heard from Senorita Isidora?"

"Yes, I faithfully promise you that," was the response.

"Very well; I am satisfied. *A Dios, Señor Cantatriz.*"

"*A Dios, Señor Gallardo.*"

These few brief remarks in English put an idea into Billy's head, and as the young man was about going, he suddenly exclaimed:

"It is *you* that I want ter see, though, and not th' old gentleman," addressing the young man.

"Me?"

"Jest so, sir. I'll go right along with you, and I'll talk as we go."

"Very well, come along;" and once more bidding adieu to the old man, the young one led the way out, Billy following; the old man looking after him with a gleam of fire in his eyes.

"What do you want?" the young gentleman asked, as they walked away from the house.

"Before I tell you that," said Billy, "I must ask a question or two. I believe I can give you important information. Will you tell me what your name is?"

"Certainly; it is Pablo Gallardo."

"And do you know Isidora Cantatriz?"

Billy remembered the pronunciation, and spoke the name fairly well.

To his surprise the young man stopped short, grasped his shoulder, and demanded:

"Do you know anything of her?"

"Mebby I do, and mebby I don't," answered Billy; "I'm not ready to say, yet. You must answer my question first."

"Very well, then, I know the lady. More than that, she is my promised wife. If you know anything of her whereabouts, for heaven's sake give us the information. I am nearly crazed over her sudden and mysterious disappearance."

"Sweet pertaters!" exclaimed Billy; and to the amazement of the young Spaniard he proceeded to execute a dance then and there, as though he had suddenly taken leave of his senses.

CHAPTER XIII.

BILLY'S UNIQUE DISGUISE.

"ARE you out of your head?"

So the young gentleman asked, when Billy ceased.

"No, but I'm tickled clear down to my toes," Billy answered.

"You acted as though something was the matter. What tickles you?"

"I'm tickled ter know that you are th' lover of th' fair Isidora, that's all. I took ter you at first sight. Now give me th' p'ints in this case, and then I'll tell ye what I know."

"What do you mean?" What case? We must have no misunderstanding."

"That suits me exactly. I heard you ask that old rascal of a Cantatriz—"

"Carrai! have a care how you speak!" the Spaniard interrupted.

"Oh! I know what I'm talking about," Billy averred, "and don't you forget it. I heard you ask th' old scoundrel if he'd send you word as soon as he hears from th' lady, and he said yes; but he lied like sin, and I'm goin' ter prove it to ye, straight as a string."

"Pest on it! what do you mean? What are you talking about?"

"I'll git thar, presently, and then you'll see. As soon as I heard your question and his answer, I made up my mind that it was you that I wanted ter see, and so I spoke up as I did. Now, how long has this lady been missing?"

"Since night before last. She went out of her uncle's house—Cantatriz is her uncle, and has not been seen or heard of since. Her uncle is worried almost to death, and it is needless to say that I am the same. I have offered a reward of a thousand dollars to any one who can give me information concerning her. The police are looking for her everywhere."

"Sweet pertaters!" exclaimed the youthful New York detective, "but I think I'll corral that thousand, and nary discount."

"Then you know something about her? Tell me, if you do, and put an end to this terrible suspense."

"All right," agreed Billy, "I'll do it. This

forenoon I was in a certain part of this city, when a note fell on the sidewalk at my feet. It was written in three languages, and was signed Isidora Cantatriz. It was a call for help. The lady said she was a prisoner, imprisoned by her uncle, who was bent upon robbing her of her fortune."

"Carrai! can this be true?"

"Oh! it's jest as true as preachin'," Billy assured. "Later on, I got into trouble myself, and later, when I went with th' police to rescue th' lady, or rather to arrest the villain who was in th' same house, though I intended to make one job of it; then the den was deserted. The rascals had taken the lady to some other place."

The young Spaniard almost groaned.

"Then she is lost, lost. Oh! is it possible that Juan Cantatriz is such a consummate rascal?"

"You can jest bet he is. He has vowed that th' girl shall marry him, or else shall sign papers that will turn her fortune over to him."

"The old knave! He has been playing the hypocrite with me! He shall suffer for this, I swear it! if harm comes to that lady. We must find her, my young friend; we must bring the police to our aid, and scour—"

"Hold your bosses right there," Billy interrupted. "Th' police and I are out, in this game. I go it alone, or I don't go it at all."

"Who are you? You haven't told me your name yet."

"You would not be any better off if I did," returned Billy. "You wouldn't know me any better."

"No, but I don't know what to call you. I have given you my name, and you ought to be willing to let me know yours."

"Well, mine is Billy Weston."

"Weston, Weston—Say, you are not the chap who played such a part in taking those bank robbers the other night, are you?"

"Yes, I'm th' feller," Billy owned, modestly; "but, that's got nothin' ter do with this case."

"I'm glad to know you!" the young Spaniard exclaimed, and he grasped Billy's hand warmly. "The papers gave you a big puff, but they'll give you a bigger one if you will only help me to rescue the lady I love. Come, I'll help you, and will be guided by your advice. How shall we proceed?"

"I hope ye won't find your confidence in me misplaced," Billy observed. "If you go by what th' paper said about me, though, you will. I don't pose as a hero, not even a little bit."

"Well, well, let that pass. How shall we proceed? What can I do to help in the matter? Heavens! I cannot be idle now."

"Are you armed?" Billy asked.

"I have a *pantayal*—that is, a dagger."

"I don't go a cent on that sort of weapon," declared Billy. "You want a revolver."

"I can easily get one."

"And you'll have the nerve to use it?"

"Try me. A dozen men shall not keep my Isidora from me!"

"If you are a quarter as brave as your talk, you'll do," said Billy.

"But, where is the lady?"

"That's what I've got to find out."

"And how are you going to find out?"

"I know th' men who have got the keeping of her, and sooner or later one of them will come to visit the young lady's uncle, and then I'll follow him back to the biding place."

"You are shrewd. Only direct me, and I will render all the help I can."

"Well, you must get that weapon and some handcuffs, the first thing, and then we must have disguises. Do you know where we can get them?"

"Yes, I know well. I bought one there last Carnival. Come on with me."

They set out in all haste, and ere long found a shop where firearms could be bought, and there Pablo bought a revolver. Handcuffs he could not get.

From that place they went on to a costumer's, entered, and made known their wants.

Broadway Billy knew that he would have to go to the extreme, in order to baffle the keen-eyed detectives, if he chanced to meet them, so he had himself made up to imitate a Chinaman.

The Spaniard chose a rig that transformed him into a typical Mexican cowboy of the Rio Grande region.

Billy's outfit was superb, of its kind, and he was made up with care. No one could have doubted, scarcely, that he was the genuine article.

His Spanish friend enjoyed a hearty laugh at his expense, as they came out of the place, and asked his name.

"Me name alleee same Wong Bung," Billy responded.

"That's a good name, anyhow. And now let us get to business."

They forthwith returned to the neighborhood of Juan Cantatriz's house.

The situation there was the same, so far as outward appearances were concerned, and as they passed the house, on the opposite side of the street, they were fortunate enough to see Cantatriz through one of the windows.

"He's there," declared Billy, "and now all we've got to do is to watch the house. It's our only hope. There's no other clew to work on."

"Yes, there he is. But, say, you must not forget to initiate the Chinaman when you speak."

"Oh! I'll do that sure enough, when occasion requires," assured Billy.

They sat down on the steps of a deserted shop, some little distance away from the house they were watching, and fell into conversation.

"Sweet pertaters!" Billy exclaimed, suddenly, when they had been there a little while. "here is somethin' that I didn't think of. Wish I had some brains in my rattle-box, anyhow."

"What is it?" asked the Spaniard.

"Why, suppose old Cantatriz goes off in a carriage; we'd be in a bad fix ter foller."

"You are right. We must have a conveyance of some sort."

"Will you go and get one?"

"Yes; remain here."

"I will, if th' game don't start up."

They exchanged addresses, so that they could find each other in case this did happen, and then Gallardo set out.

Within half an hour he was back again, in a cab, and stopping at the end of the street he motioned Billy to join him.

This Billy did, and when he had explained the situation carefully to the driver, they drove down just past the Cantatriz house, and pulling in to the curb on the opposite side of the street, waited.

Their wait was a long one.

It was growing dark before anything of importance took place.

They had taken turns at watching the door of the house, and it was the young Spaniard's watch when something happened to break the monotony of the work a little and rouse them up.

"Ha!" the Spaniard exclaimed, "a telegraph messenger has entered the house. What does that mean?"

"It looks like the beginning of our fun, at last," responded Billy.

They both watched the door, now, and presently the messenger came out and went away. "I don't think it's worth while to follow him," mused Billy, "for there will be bigger game for our guns after a time."

"I think so, too," agreed Pablo.

Night settled down, and the lamps were lighted.

There was one near the door of the Cantatriz house, so the watchers did not have to change their position to continue their vigil.

An hour passed, and finally Juan Cantatriz came out.

He walked leisurely down the street, and Billy giving the driver of the cab a signal that had been agreed upon, the cab followed him.

The old man evidently had no suspicion that he was being watched, for he did not turn his head, but kept straight on.

He walked for a long distance, more than half a mile at least, and then, at a corner where he stopped, he was presently joined by another man.

Their hands met for an instant, and they set out down another street at a little livelier gait.

"That man is th' Joe Barbley I have mentioned," observed Billy to his companion, as the cab followed on. "We are on th' right trail now, and you want to git up nerve an' muscle for th' fracas that's bound ter come."

"Don't fear for me," was the assurance; "you will find me all there, as you Americans say."

CHAPTER XIV.

LIEUTENANT SKINNY INTERVIEWED.

LIEUTENANT SKINNY was in the room at the hotel, writing a letter home, when there came a knock at the door.

Calling out for the applicant to enter, Detective Dalworth came in.

It was about an hour after he and Broadway Billy had gone away together.

"Hello!" Skinny exclaimed; "back a'ready! Where's Billy?"

"That's what I've come here to find out," the detective growled.

Skinny laughed heartily.

"Then he's got away from ye as soon as this, has he?" he cried. "I guess that dollar of yours has gone th' way that all good dollars go. Oh! but you might a' known he'd do it. He's jest a rip-snorter when he gits wound up, is that same Billy."

"But, I had no idea that he could do it. Chance favored him, though."

"Oh, you bet! He's jest th' lad that kin make th' most of a slim chance, he is. I'll bet he could get away from two of ye, jest as easy."

The detective was too much disgusted to own that that was just what Billy had done.

"It was all dumb luck," he averred again.

"But he got away jest th' same," taunted Skinny.

"Say, do you know where he is?"

"No, I do not."

"And you wouldn't tell me if you did?"

"No, don't think I would."

"I would like to know. You see the case is just like this: He has gone to encounter some very desperate characters, and the chances are that he will get killed. I don't look for anything else, unless we can get on his track again, and follow him to protect him. If we could be on hand when he runs the game to earth, if he does, then the whole matter could be brought to a head and he would get all the glory of it."

"Well, I'm tellin' ye honest that I don't know where he is. Couldn't find him if I wanted to, and that's th' truth."

"But, you know where he set out to go, don't you?"

"Certainly."

"Well, where was it?"

"You ought to know, since you went with him."

"Oh! I don't mean there; I mean what other place had he in mind?"

"I give it up."

"Then you don't know?"

"Nary time."

"Don't fool me, lad. Your partner's life is in danger."

"If I was you I wouldn't go into mournin' fer him afore he's dead," Skinny advised.

"Then you think he will come out all right?"

"I'll bet a dollar he does."

"You have big confidence in him."

"Why shouldn't I have? You don't know Broadway Billy like I know him. Why, that feller has been killed, poisoned, blown up, drowned, hanged, dead, buried, and otherwise maltreated in ways too numerous ter mention, and he's on deck yet."

"Yes, but now he's in desperate danger."

"Can't help it, he'll come up smiling, you see if he don't."

"And do you think he'll recapture Sharkey Dan?"

"It wouldn't surprise me any."

"Has he got any clew to where he is?"

"If he hasn't he'll find one."

"Then he knows where to look for one."

"Yes, I ruther think he does."

"And where is it?"

"See any green in my off eye?"

"Say, my lad, why won't you trust me?" the detective asked. "I like that partner of yours, and if any harm should come to him I'd be mighty sorry. So would you, too. How would you feel, to see him brought here dead, when by confiding in me may be the means of saving his life?"

The detective was trying to work upon Skinny's sensitive nature, though of course he had no knowledge as to how sensitive it was.

Skinny felt the force of this, but he could not give information that he did not possess.

"If I don't know, it ain't easy ter tell," he declared.

"That's true enough; but if you can only give me a hint as to some place he intended going to, it may put me in the way of finding him. An hour from now may be too late. You have been in the power of those men; you know what they are."

"You bet I do. Come to look th' thing right in th' face, Billy is takin' a big risk."

"Of course he is," cried the detective, encouraged. "He is in the worst sort of danger, and only the promptest kind of action can save him. You put me upon his track, and I'll see that no harm comes to him."

"But, as I said afore, that's what I can't do. I couldn't find him myself. I wouldn't know where to look for him."

The detective had come to get some clew to Billy's whereabouts, and he meant to have it if it was to be had.

"Don't you know of any place that he thought of going to?"

"Not to any certainty."

"Had he any other business on hand besides finding where Sharkey Dan is?"

"Yes, he had another fish in his pan."

"Ha! what was that?"

"Mebbe he'd kick me fer telling."

"Not under such circumstances. Think of the risk he is running. You don't know where he is. He may never return, and then how would you feel? You had better give me every point you can."

Skinny was in a dilemma. He realized that there was truth in all the detective said, and yet he did not want to let out anything that Billy might not want told. Still, he could not see what damage he could do to his partner's cause by mentioning the case of the Spanish girl.

"Well, he's got onto a clew to a girl that is imprisoned, and he wants to get her out."

The detective was upon his feet in an instant, greatly excited.

"Imprisoned!" he cried.

"Yes, that's th' case."

"Where? Who is she?"

"I don't know where. She was in th' same house that I was in, but goodness only knows where she is now."

"Did you hear her name mentioned?"

"Yes, but I couldn't say it if I tried. She's Spanish."

"Great Julius Caesar!" the detective cried, "it must be Isidora Cantatriz!"

"I guess that's th' name," said Skinny.

Dalworth paced the floor like a caged tiger.

Was this beardless boy to find that girl, when all the police of the city had so far been unable to do so?

"It must not be—it should not be!"

"And you say he has a clew to her place of concealment?" he demanded. "Why, there's a thousand dollars' reward offered for— But, what clew has he? Come, lad, you must tell me all you know."

But Detective Dalworth instantly discovered that he had made a great mistake in mentioning the reward.

Skinny's eyes flew open, and his mouth flew shut.

"Come, tell me what you can," the detective urged; "where has he gone to get on track of this girl?"

"See here," said Skinny, "I'm afraid I've talked now a good deal more than is good for me."

"But, think of your partner's danger!"

"Yes, I know; and I'm thinkin' of that thousand dollars, too. If Billy is after that, and I should put you onto his game, he'd take it out of my hide, sure. I guess I won't talk any more, fer fear I'll say somethin'."

"Confound you! you almost tempt me to shake your bones out of your clothes! If you don't tell me all you know, instantly, I'll arrest you! You are standing in the way of an officer in the discharge of his duty."

"And in th' way of his gettin' a whack at that reward, too, eh?"

"That's all a blind. I was only fooling with you."

"All right, I'll take it as a blind, but for fear it ain't, I'm mum. I'll take th' chances of Billy's not gettin' out all right, I guess."

Skinny had wakened up to the importance of the matter.

If Billy could only get ahead of the detectives in this, he would score a base-hit, sure.

The thin partner did not mean to say another word that might in any way damage Billy's prospects of bagging that hoolie.

"Then you won't tell me?"

"Nixey. I don't know much to tell, but th' little I do know I'll keep."

"Your partner's blood will be on your head, if harm comes to him."

"I said I'd take th' risk o' that."

"See here, I'll give you ten dollars if you will post me."

"Not for a hundred. I don't sell Billy out if I know it. I came mighty near giving him away, and mebby I would if you hadn't posted me about that reward, but now I'm shut up ter stay shut."

"I'll give you a hundred, spot cash, if you'll give me the same clew that Billy is working on."

"Can't be did."

"Do you know what his clew is?"

"Yes, I know it hard enough."

"And you think he'll win?"

"He will if he don't lose."

"Confound you for a fool! You are enough to exasperate a saint. Say, help me to win that reward, and I'll give you half of it."

"I'd a heap rather see Billy have it all."

"It is not the reward I am looking after," the

detective declared, "but it is the honor of finding that lost girl. Here the whole force is after her, and it will be a big thing for the man who finds her."

"Jest so; and if Broadway Billy beats ye all in th' game, it will be considerable of a tall feather in his hat. Oh! you won't get any points out of me now, so you might just as well give it up."

"All right," said the detective, resuming something of the dignity he had dropped, "I won't press you any further. If you hear of the Chinese shrimp-catchers of Potrero Cove or San Bruno Point finding the body of your partner some days from this, don't blame me. I've offered to help him."

"No, I won't hold you in any way responsible," Skinny promised. "And," he added, "if by any accident Billy should get ahead of you in this race for gold and glory, don't think too hard of him."

With a muttered growl the detective went from the room, shutting the door after him with a bang.

CHAPTER XV.

PREPARING TO STRIKE.

THE cab followed on.

Billy and Gallardo kept their eyes upon the men.

Cantatriz and Barbley looked neither to the right nor to the left.

They pressed on, talking earnestly, it appeared, and evidently without the least suspicion that they were being followed.

"This game has got to be played with care," Broadway Billy observed. "At th' least suspicion on their part they will give us trouble."

"No doubt of it," agreed the Spaniard. "I will do just as you direct, for I have full confidence in you. If it comes to a fight, don't be afraid for me."

"I'm not in th' habit of bein' afraid for anybody nor of anybody," Billy assured. "I'm into this game to win, and I'm going to do it if it costs a leg. I'll take that Sharkey Dan, if I set eyes on him, if I have to take him dead. I've made up my mind to that."

"Ha! that is the man you are after, is it? He is the one you shot the other night, and who got away from the police afterward."

"He's th' same chicken, and since then he's tried to kill me and my slender partner. Oh, I've got it in for him, and don't forget it."

They talked on, but not for a moment did they lose sight of the men they were following.

"What part of th' city are we in, anyhow?" Billy finally asked.

"We are getting into one of the most disreputable quarters of the whole town," the Spaniard answered.

"I thought it didn't look very inviting," Billy observed.

"It is the haunt of thieves, and worse."

"We'll know what ter do in case we get into a corner, then."

"And what is that?"

"Fight our way out, if we have to kill a dozen—Hello! there they go!"

The men they were watching had just entered a house.

Only a little further did the driver of the cab go, and then stopped.

He had been directed what to do, and had played his part well. He had done such work before.

When the cab stopped, Billy and his companion got out.

"Any further use for me?" asked the driver.

"We shall want the cab if we succeed in getting the lady," observed Gallardo.

"Yes, that's so," agreed Billy. "Yes, wait here for us. We'll double the price we promised you."

"All right, I'm your mutton."

"And, by the way," Billy said further, in the way of precaution, "if you do not see either of us in one hour, go and tell the police to come to our help."

"All right to that, too. I was going to mention somethin' of that kind. You are goin' into a mighty bad hole, there. You want to look out that you don't get into a death-trap."

Billy responded to that, and he and his friend went forward to take a look at the house, keeping on the opposite side of the street from it.

In one of the windows of the top floor was a light. All of the others were dark.

"How are we to proceed?" the Spaniard asked.

"I'm tryin' ter solve that problem," said Billy.

"Well, only direct me."

"I'll do that."

Billy was thoughtful for some moments, and then he said:

"Th' house seems ter be dark, all but that room up there. We must try to get in, and I'll go and try th' front door. If you see me go in, you follow."

"Go ahead. I'll go anywhere, dare anything, for my poor darling's sake."

Billy crossed the street and tried the door carefully, but it was fast.

He shook his head, and motioned Pablo to join him.

"It's no go that way," he observed. "Here's an alley at th' side of th' house, though; we'll try that."

"Lead on. You'll find me with you."

They went into the alley, Billy ahead, and proceeded cautiously to the rear of the house.

There they found a gate, closed, but it was not fastened, and opening it they were in a small yard.

Looking up at the windows, they saw a light in the room of the second floor, and listening, heard voices.

"They're up there," whispered Billy, "and we have got to play our cards with care."

"It is going to be a desperate piece of business."

"You're right it is. We're taking our lives in our hands. If you want to back out, now is your time."

"Caramba!" the Spaniard hissed; "have I hinted that I want to back out?"

"Nary, and don't. Now we'll try this door."

Three steps led up to a rear door, and Billy went up them silently, as his Chinese shoes enabled him to do, and tried the door.

To his great satisfaction he found it unfastened.

Opening it with great caution, he motioned his companion to follow.

There was just light enough there for them to see each other.

Pablo followed up the steps, but as one of his boots creaked slightly, Billy stopped him there.

"Off with yer boots," he whispered; "one of 'em is noisy."

The Spaniard obeyed.

"There, that's better," said Billy. "If ye step on a tack, or hurt yer foot in any way, ye must grin and bear it. Don't make a sound. Now, come on."

With his hand on his companion's jacket, Billy led the way along the hall, feeling cautiously, and soon came to the stairs.

They started up this with even more caution, and finally came to the top, where light streamed out from under a door, and where the voices of men could be plainly overheard.

They stopped a moment to listen, and Billy was satisfied that he recognized the voices of Sharkey Dan and Joe Barbley.

"Yes," another voice spoke up, "I'll play priest, and if she won't marry you, señor, I'll marry her to Joe anyhow."

"All right," responded the voice of old Cantatriz, "that will do nicely. As soon as you are ready we will go up and see her."

"I'll be ready," responded Joe, "soon's I see to my friend's hurt."

Billy had felt Gallardo give a start, and fearing that he might do something to betray their presence, drew him along down the hall.

Another flight of stairs was soon reached, and they went up.

Reaching the next floor, light was seen again, under another door, and the voice of the old hag, Mommy Murry, was heard.

"Cheer up, sweetie," she was saying, "for th' gentlemen will soon be here to see you. You must look your best, you know. Te, he, he, he! I'll go now, and they'll be up shortly. Be a sensible thing, and do as they want ye to, fer you are too young and pooty ter die. They'll kill ye, I have no doubt, if—"

That was all Billy and Pablo heard, for the young detective had pulled Pablo away, when the old hag said she was going.

Running his hand along the wall, Billy found a door, and trying it, found it unlocked.

It opened upon a dark room, and into that the two daring spirits stepped, closing the door after them.

They were none too soon, for barely had the door closed when the old hag stepped out into the hall and hobbled along and descended the stairs.

Billy drew a breath of relief, and looking around, saw that light found its way into this room under another door.

By a whisper he called the attention of his companion to it.

"It's her room," he said.

"Then we will get her out immediately!" exclaimed Pablo.

Billy grabbed his arm firmly.

"Hold your bosses," he whispered, "and don't go off too quick. We've got ter bag th' game at th' same time. Th' lady must help us do that. You keep right still, now, while I whisper to her. Mind, not a peep out of you!"

"All right, I'll obey," the Spaniard promised.

Billy advanced to the door and felt over it carefully. It was secured with a heavy bolt. This he drew back, with steady care, and opened the door just a crack.

"Miss Cantatriz," he whispered.

"Who speaks?" the lady answered in guarded tone.

"A friend," Billy whispered, and he opened the door further and stepped into the room, holding up his finger to warn her to keep silent.

He beheld a strikingly beautiful Spanish girl, about eighteen years of age.

"Not a word," he cautioned, "but listen. I am in disguise. I am the friend who found the note you threw out of the window, and who answered as you directed. I am here to rescue you. But you must wait a few minutes, as I must take your enemies prisoners at the same time. They will soon be up. Act as though you have no hope of rescue. Your lover is with me—Hist! not a word! He is with me, but when we come into the room you must not spring toward him. He will be armed, and you might get shot."

The young lady's eyes sparkled, and her face was flushed.

"I understand," she said, "and will do as you say."

"Even if several minutes pass before you see us do not be alarmed," Billy added. "We will let that precious uncle of yours show his hand."

He backed out of the room and fastened the door.

Gallardo was right there, and taking him by the arm, Billy proceeded to lay out their plan of action.

"We will remain in this room until they come up," he said. "I think all three of them will come. As soon as they go into the room—Hold on, though, wait here a moment."

He slipped out into the hall, and went forward to the other door of the fair prisoner's room.

"It is all right," he announced, when he came back; "that door is fastened with a bolt the same as this. As soon as they get in the room I will slip out and bolt the door. Then we will go down and make sure of my bold burglar."

"I see, I see," whispered Gallardo, greatly excited.

"All right; but keep cool, and keep your nerves steady."

"Yes, I'll try to."

"My success will depend upon your help," Billy assured, "and I can't afford to lose the game now. Ha! here they come! Now be as still as a mouse, and we'll soon have them where they can't do any harm. Have your weapon ready, for if they should come into this room we'll have to fight. Silent, now!"

Heavy steps passed along the hall, the bolt of the front room door was heard to click, and Billy looked cautiously out, saw Cantatriz, Barbley, Jarrold, and the old hag, all enter the room.

CHAPTER XVI.

BILLY WINS THE GAME.

No sooner had the door closed behind them than Billy was out.

He glided forward as softly as a cat might have done, and silently slipped the bolt into the socket.

Back he went, then, caught hold of his companion, and together they descended the stairs.

On reaching the bottom, Billy stopped and whispered:

"Now, what we have got to do must be done prompt and quick. I'll go into th' room, playin' th' Chinaman, and you stand at th' door ready ter spring in. Have your handkerchief in hand, ready ter cram clear down th' rascal's throat, if necessary. He mustn't be allowed ter holler."

"All right, I understand, and you can depend on me."

"I begin to believe I can. We must be quick, though, for if he has got a revolver with him we are likely ter git a bullet."

"I'll be quick enough."

"I'll leave th' door open six inches or so, and th' instant you hear me say bands up! you jump in, pistol in one hand and th' gag ready in th' other."

"I understand."

They moved forward, Billy in advance, and on coming to the door from under which the light came, Billy opened it and went in.

He left it open about as he had said he would.

"Git out of here!" Sharkey Dan ordered, rising upon his elbow in the bed.

He was in bed, but had his clothes all on.

Billy jumped, as with surprise, and exclaimed:

"Allee light, me allee same gitee out; me blingee noteet."

As he said this he began to fumble into his loose trowsers, as though in earnest search of the mentioned note.

"Who is it for? you yaller thief!"

"Allee same me tellee givee it to— Hi! me havee him now!"

With that Billy drew a bit of paper from his pocket and advanced with it.

Sharkey put out his hand to receive it, but the instant that Billy got to the side of the bed his right hand came suddenly out from under his blouse, with a cocked five-shooter in its grasp, and he cried:

"Put up your hands, or die!"

Almost with the words Gallardo sprung in, and his weapon, too, was at the rascal's head, while his handkerchief was pressed over his mouth.

Seconds counted, and no sooner was the Spaniard there than Billy whipped out a pair of handcuffs, and before Sharkey could fully realize what had happened, they were upon his wrists.

That done, the gag was forced into the rascal's mouth, and he was helpless.

It had been the work of ten seconds.

A piece of rope was found in the room, and with the two determined captors bound the arms of their prisoner to his sides, and tied his feet together.

Sharkey's eyes were almost bulging from their sockets, as his gaze followed Billy around, and when he was secured, to Billy's satisfaction, the lad stopped before him and said:

"Oh! it's me, Sharkey; me, yer old-time friend, Broadway Willyum. Th' situation is slightly changed since last we met. Now I must go and take care of th' rest of th' p'izen crew. Don't go away while I'm gone."

Billy turned to leave the room, but on second thought he went back and felt in his prisoner's pockets.

In a side pocket of his coat was a revolver, and Billy took that.

He led the way out of the room, then, and along the hall to the foot of the stairs, where he stopped to give further directions.

"We'll go through that first room," he said, "and enter the other by that door that connects them. We'll both bound in at once, with the order for them to hold up their hands. No doubt Barbley and Jarrold will make a break for the hall door. They'll find it locked, and we'll have 'em."

"I understand."

"Then, when they are cornered, you go forward and put this pair of handcuffs on them. Dare you do it?"

"Try me."

"All right, I will. Lock the two together, a hand of each, and then we'll see about the others. If they offer to resist, I'll shoot them as sure as I live."

They went on, and were soon at the door of the room, the inner door.

Here they stopped a moment to listen.

"Either marry me," old Cantatriz was saying, in English, "or I will force you to marry this man, here and now, and then you shall sign."

"I defy you all!" cried the young lady.

"You do, eh? Then you refuse to do as I bid?"

"I do, most determinedly."

"Carrai! but I will teach you a les—"

"Back! Do not touch me, Juan Cantatriz!"

"I will show—"

At that instant the door was flung open, and Broadway Billy and Pablo sprung into the room.

"Up with your hands! every one of you!" cried the disguised bootblack bravo, "or we'll drill holes through you that you can't plug up with a cane!"

The faces of the three rascals blanched, and Barbley and Jarrold made a dash for the hall door, quick as a flash.

They found it locked, though, and with a muted oath they stood at bay.

"Hands up!" cried Billy, again, "or we'll drop ye jest as sure as you're born. We mean real old biz, and you kin depend on it."

The gleaming five-shooters spoke whole vol-

umes, and after a moment of hesitation the two desperate villains raised their hands.

Old Cantatriz had already done so, and was begging not to be killed.

"That's th' stuff," cried Billy, "and now if ye make one move while my pard puts th' bracelets on ye, you're dead on th' spot. I'm a sure shot, and I give ye fair warnin' that I'll shoot to kill."

Billy had two revolvers in hand, and as he held the two men covered, Pablo stepped forward and handcuffed them.

"Now disarm them," Billy directed.

This was done.

Billy had an ey, on old Cantatriz, too, and now he came in for a share of attention.

Gallardo tied his hands securely behind his back, paying no heed to his pleading for mercy.

As soon as the enemies had been secured, Pablo Gallardo and Isidora Cantatriz sprung into each other's arms.

"Tableau!" cried Broadway Billy. "Allee same bling on led-fire, to tune of slow music."

"Who in blazes are you?" demanded Joe Barbley.

"Me allee same Broadway Billy, your late prisoner," was the answer.

"The warm climate you are! How did you hunt us to this place?"

"Oh! I have a way of doing things that is peculiarly my own."

"Well, now what is to be done?" asked Gallardo.

"Jest what I'm tryin' ter get through my hair," answered Billy. "D'ye think we can get these prisoners away from here without police help?"

"I think you had better not risk it," the Spaniard advised. "This is a bad neighborhood, and their friends might rally and take them away from us."

"Jest so. I believe there's hoss sense in that. Well, will you go and get the police help?"

"Certainly. Shall be glad to do it."

"Good enough. Take the lady with you, and take her to a place of safety, and then go and get the police and come back. Just tell 'em that Broadway Billy has got Sharkey Dan cornered, and that if they want him they can have him. Don't waste any time."

"I'll be back within half an hour."

So saying, Gallardo left the house, taking Isidora with him.

Space has not permitted the quotation of all that was said. Old Cantatriz had been pleading; the young lady had been thanking Billy again and again for the service he had rendered; her lover had been telling the villainous uncle the sort of mercy he might expect; and so forth.

"Now, my precious rascals," said Billy, when Gallardo had gone, "you can sit down or stand up, just as you please; but at the first move or sound out of you I'll see how many buttons I can shoot off your vests."

With muttered imprecations, Joe and Ben sat down despairingly, but old Cantatriz stood and wept and wailed and begged Billy to let him go.

"It's no use your goin' on like that," Billy told him, "for you don't get out of here if I know myself, and I think I do."

In less than half an hour the tread of heavy feet was heard, and soon the door of the room was opened and Pablo Gallardo entered, followed by the chief of police and four officers.

"Where is that lad?" asked the chief, looking around.

"Oh! this is me," cried Billy, "as big as life and twice as natural."

"The deuce!"

The chief could hardly believe that it was possible, but he was soon convinced of it.

"You are a detective born!" the chief complimented. "You have done a piece of work that any veteran might be proud of."

The prisoners, including Sharkey Dan, were taken to the nearest station, and care was exercised that they should not get another chance to escape.

Then the chief took Billy with him to Headquarters.

"How old are you, my lad?" he asked.

"I'm just past nineteen, sir," Billy answered.

"You are older than you look. What did you say your name is?"

Billy told him, and after a good many more questions had been asked, he was allowed to go. He wondered what it all meant.

Next day the prisoners were examined, and Billy was on hand.

Sharkey Dan, of course, was already under lock and key, and Joe Barbley and Ben Jerrold, as well as Mommy Murry, were soon sent to join him.

Old Cantatriz tried to lie out of his part in the affair, but, when Billy produced the letter that he had sent to Barbley, he gave up. He, too, was sent to jail to await trial.

It came out that his brother, Isidora's father, who had died a year previously, had left his will in such a manner that the girl's signature to a certain paper was all that was needed to put everything into old Juan's hands. But he had another iron in the fire. The old rascal wanted to marry the girl, and in that way become master of the big estate. But, he was foiled, and had every prospect of a term in prison.

On the day following, Broadway Billy was called to Headquarters.

There, in the presence of many of the detectives of the force, including Detective Dalworth, he was presented with a handsome gold and silver badge, inscribed with his name, that of the presenter, and a brief account of the service rendered.

It is needless to add that he was justly proud of the honor.

Detective Dalworth looked green with envy, but he put on a good face and congratulated Billy in his heartiest manner.

Skinny was there, too, and he turned over to Billy the wager he and Dalworth had laid.

That afternoon Billy and Skinny were invited to a wedding.

It was that of Pablo Gallardo and Isidora Cantatriz.

The lads went, and there Billy was presented with the reward he had earned, the promised thousand dollars; and both he and Skinny received a handsome gold watch.

Billy promptly shared the reward with his thin partner.

The bride and groom were about to set out for the Cantatriz estate, some hundred miles south of San Francisco, and they pressed Billy and Skinny to accompany them. And so earnest was the invitation that the lads finally accepted.

So we take our leave of them for the present, trusting that their week's sojourn in the Italy of America will be pleasant indeed.

THE END.

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BEADLE AND ADAMS, Publishers,
 98 William Street, New York.